

## ABSTRACT

The History of African Americans in Fort Worth, Texas  
1875-1980

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African American urban histories in the United States typically focus on larger cities in the nation such as Chicago, New York, and Washington, D.C. Despite the low amount of scholarly works looking at Texas cities, the Lone Star State was not a welcoming region for freedmen. This paper adds to the African American historical scholarship by discussing the black Fort Worth urban experience, focusing specifically from post Reconstruction to 1980. As the southern city grew during the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, African American residents faced similar prejudices and obstacles as other blacks in larger cities elsewhere in southern and northern regions. This is their story of overcoming these barriers and becoming an integrated part of Fort Worth culture.

The History of African Americans in Fort Worth, Texas  
1875-1980

by

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A Thesis

Approved by the Department of History

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ACT	Allied Communities of Tarrant [County]
IAF	Industrial Areas Foundation
NACW	National Association of Colored Women
NUL	National Urban League
TCIC	Texas Commission of Interracial Cooperation
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

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## CHAPTER ONE

### A Historiography of the African American Urban Experience

The study of the African American experience in urban settings is not a new trend. Historians have studied and written about the African American experience in the United States since the nineteenth century. The focus, however, stayed mainly within the realm of general overarching themes. Sociologists rather than historians first touched upon the topic of African Americans in urban settings. W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (1899) was the first scholarly work about African American urban culture. While Du Bois described various aspects of the black community in Philadelphia including patterns of population growth, education, and race relations, his method was based in the social science of sociology. Du Bois's reason for the work fell in line with other social reformers of his time. He saw a problem of racial tension within Philadelphia and believed that by describing the situation, the public would be aware of the problem and would work to resolve the issue. This tension, Du Bois believed, related directly to the mass emigration of southern blacks into northern cities. Du Bois's regionally focused sociological study became the forerunner of similar studies with the same exodus focus during the next sixty years.<sup>1</sup>

Few published works before World War I focused on black urban studies. The prime example of pre and postwar African American urban cultural scholarship is *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot* (1922) by Charles S. Johnson. Johnson's study gave great insight into the black urban experience and offered

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<sup>1</sup>W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia, 1899).

factors relating to racial violence; however, the work failed to include a vital aspect. While he used history as background information to explain why African Americans moved to northern cities, Johnson did not involve history to discuss how the specific topics of slavery and segregation affected contemporary events and race relations. Further studies by sociologists contained the same omission.<sup>2</sup>

Robert E. Park elaborated on Du Bois's race relations theory in 1913. Park's theory created the idea that the dynamics of race relations evolved through four consecutive phases: contact, competition, accommodation, and assimilation. Continuing with the sociological trends of the time, Park focused his research on large northern urban centers rather than on his original study of the American South. According to Park, the Great Migration of African American southerners moving to northern cities around World War I placed black Americans in the same condition as European immigrants moving to large urban areas. The cyclical race relations theory remained constant, continued to grow, and would never cease; thus, Park's argument concluded that African Americans were not a unique minority in the city.<sup>3</sup> Continuing with this argument, E. Franklin Frazier published *The Negro Family in Chicago* (1932) and described how black families in Chicago arranged themselves according to economic class systems, thereby challenging the general belief of a ghettoized culture. Sociologists and historians disputed the concept of a ghetto later in the publications on urban history.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Charles S. Johnson, *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot* (Chicago: Commission on Race Relations, 1922).

<sup>3</sup>Robert E. Park, *Race & Culture* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1950).

<sup>4</sup>E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932).

In 1945, a combination of sociology and anthropology merged to create a step toward the study of urban history when St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton published *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, in association with social anthropologist W. Lloyd Warner. For the first time, a study of the African American urban experience included an in-depth discussion and analysis of black American life in the city. Even though all three men previously worked on Deep South studies, the combined effort focused on the city of Chicago because it remained difficult to compile complete information in the South. It was during this venture that Drake and Cayton adopted the term “ghetto” to describe the segregated section of the city termed “Bronzeville” by its residents.<sup>5</sup> Around the same time, Robert Weaver posed the idea that the word “ghetto” was a recent term developed during the Great Migration, in his book, *The Negro Ghetto* (1948), a theory disputed by the first true urban historians.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1950s, urban scholarship came to a halt as historians focused their attention on the history of slavery, emancipation, and Jim Crow in the light of civil rights activities around the nation. If any historian studied urban history in the South, they looked at southern antebellum cities, not contemporary centers. The previous studies done by sociologists between 1900 and 1950, however, proved useful because they gave insight on black communities and introduced various theories and approaches for future historians. The preceding faults of sociologists overlooking how history shaped current or future events and excluding southern, western, and smaller northern cities ended with the first urban historians during the 1960s.

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<sup>5</sup>St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1945).

<sup>6</sup>Robert Weaver, *The Negro Ghetto* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1948).

The years between 1963 and 1980 saw the advent of complete historical studies of northern urban centers. These official urban historians based their work on previous sociological studies but imposed historical dominance over the topic and a focus on the pre-Depression years. During these years, two main ideas surfaced regarding the African American urban experience. Scholars determined that the term “ghetto,” while previously associated with the Great Migration, actually developed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Historians also pinpointed how African Americans were not just another immigrant group within urban areas. Instead, black communities in cities were a significant minority due to intense white prejudice and hostility.<sup>7</sup>

From the 1980s through the early 1990s, urban history focus shifted as scholars sought to break away from the ghetto emphasis and focus on social groups and survival techniques within the black communities during the 1930s and 1940s. Late twentieth century historians did not want to lump African American urban history into a group summed up by the term “ghetto.” African Americans’ experiences before their move into urban landscapes were vital components to their development within cities as well as the occupations they undertook and other social systems within their communities. These more recent studies also included massive research within the American South, West, and other northern cities. Studies became available on Detroit, Cleveland, San Francisco, Seattle, Washington, D.C., and Louisville. Examples of published works during this expanse of new urban research are James Borchert’s *Alley Life in Washington: Family,*

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<sup>7</sup>Examples of such studies include Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, 1890-1930* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963); Allan Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); David Katzman, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973); and Thomas Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

*Community, Religion, and Folklife in the City, 1850-1970* (1980); Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia* (1991); and Darlene Clark Hine, “Black Migration to the Urban Midwest: The Gender Dimension, 1915-1945” (1991).<sup>8</sup>

These new works began to focus on a wider range of topics, all of which played an important role in the black American experience in urban history. For example, a major development in historical research suggested that rather than hostile southern culture pushing African Americans out of the south and into the pull of northern city opportunities, migrations to the North resulted from already established close social relationships with friends and family living in the North. Other topics such as education, gender roles, family life, businesses, politics, culture, and racial violence expanded African American urban history research.<sup>9</sup>

Racial violence topics covered issues such as slavery, prejudice, segregation, unfair treatment within the Jim Crow laws of southern states, and violence conducted by the Ku Klux Klan and enraged mobs. Historians countered the country’s most horrible past events with glimmers of hope for a united future when they included school

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<sup>8</sup>James Borchert, *Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion, and Folklife in the City, 1850-1970* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980); Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Darlene Clark Hine, “Black Migration to the Urban Midwest: The Gender Dimensions, 1915-1945,” in Trotter, ed., *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions in Race, Class, and Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Richard Walter Thomas, *Life for Us Is What We Make It: Building Black Community in Detroit, 1915-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Kenneth Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976); Douglas H. Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites: A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980); Quintard Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle’s Central District from 1870 Through the Civil Rights Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994); and George Wright, *Life Behind a Veil: Blacks in Louisville, Kentucky, 1865-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985).

<sup>9</sup>For more information regarding the historiography of the African American urban experience, refer to Joe W. Trotter’s “African Americans in the City: The Industrial Era, 1900-1950,” *Journal of Urban History*, 21:4 (May 1995), 438-57.

integration, civil rights, and the current status of racial tolerance within the nation. As the study of history moved into the 1990s, scholarship regarding African American urban history shifted direction. Continuing to the present, urban history research no longer focuses solely on the negative aspects of African American history. Earlier academic studies depicted blacks as victims and powerless and only focused on the African American elite. The new African American urban history stresses empowerment, an active involvement in their positions within the community, and a closer look at their lives in general, not just the major figures. Additionally, scholarship tends to place a greater emphasis on African Americans in the South more so than the northeastern, midwestern, and western states.<sup>10</sup>

Since this is the case, where does Texas fit into the geographical pattern of academic research? Scholars debate the factors that dictate whether Texas is a western or a southern state. Fort Worth, located in northeast Texas, is a prime example in this argument. The city's economy was, and still is, largely based on stockyards and the meat packing industry, which is commonly associated with the West. The social and racial climate, however, is very similar to those in southern cities. This is not to say that African Americans did not live in the western half of the United States. The African American experience in the West has been studied, as noted above, and remains a part of black history. The sheer number of African Americans in Texas compared to other western states, however, adds to the debate of whether Texas is a western state or a southern state. The top four cities in Texas—San Antonio, Houston, Dallas, and Fort Worth—during the mid-nineteenth century were not as large as other western urban

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<sup>10</sup>Kenneth W. Goings and Raymond A. Mohl, "Toward a New African American Urban History," *Journal of Urban History*, 21 (March 1995), 283-295; and Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

centers, but the state's cities combined African American population outnumbered the total black population in the West's five largest cities.<sup>11</sup> This dichotomy between western economic and southern cultural influences makes the study of African American history in Texas a unique enterprise.

There are many academic works devoted to Texas African American experiences, especially studies that take a microcosmic look at Texas blacks. In 1937, Harold Robert Schoen wrote about free blacks in the Republic of Texas.<sup>12</sup> Almost seventy years later, two contemporary historians focused on black Texas history's gruesome events. William Carrigan's book, *The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1916* focuses specifically on Central Texas's violent past and the multiple lynchings that took place in that portion of the state.<sup>13</sup> Patricia Bernstein concentrated her research solely on one event, the 1916 lynching of Jesse Washington, a young black teenager in Waco.<sup>14</sup> Other authors, such as Alwyn Barr, chose to focus on the black Texan experience in general.<sup>15</sup> Barr covered all aspects of the African American experience, from the conquistadors to political disfranchisement. While these works represent only a selection from the available texts concerning African Americans in Texas, it is obvious that many topics remain unexplored. Despite these few examples of

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<sup>11</sup>Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1998), 208.

<sup>12</sup>Harold Robert Schoen, "The Free Negro in the Republic of Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 40 (July 1936), 26-34.

<sup>13</sup>William Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1916* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

<sup>14</sup>Patricia Bernstein, *The First Waco Horror: The Lynching of Jesse Washington and the Rise of the NAACP* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005).

<sup>15</sup>Alwyn Barr, *Black Texans: A History of African Americans in Texas, 1528-1995*, 2d ed. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996).

scholarly works depicting the life of black Texans, there are still aspects missing, particularly regarding Fort Worth's black history.

Fort Worth, Texas, a large city that is now part of the "metroplex" known as Dallas-Fort Worth, struggled with segregation and Jim Crow laws and experienced fights for civil rights along with the rest of the United States. There are not many academic studies of the city's African American or civil rights history, but this does not mean that Fort Worth's black history is insignificant; nor does it imply that all the events were quiet and easily reconciled.<sup>16</sup> Mainly articles and graduate theses comprise the academic work regarding African American history in Fort Worth. In 1973, Laurene Sharp self-published a work entitled *100 Years of the Black Man in Fort Worth*. While this was the first book focused on African Americans in Fort Worth, Sharp's study is incomplete and lacks a bibliography, thereby making it difficult to check sources for accuracy.<sup>17</sup>

In 1988 and 1990, two graduate students focused their research projects on specific aspects within the city's African American past. Barry Sandlin's master's thesis at the University of Texas at Arlington, entitled "The 1921 Butcher Workmen Strike in Fort Worth, Texas," looked at a strike-breaking event that resulted in a lynching and nation-wide attention.<sup>18</sup> Two years later, Marjorie Clark's doctoral dissertation at the University of North Texas focused on residential racial segregation throughout the city

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<sup>16</sup>Good introductory sources regarding civil rights activities are John Dittmer, ed., *Essays on the American Civil Rights Movement* (College Station: Published for the University of Texas at Arlington by Texas A & M Press, 1993); and "African-American History Resources at the Center: A Selected Bibliography," [www.cah.utexas.edu/guides/AfricanAmerican4.html](http://www.cah.utexas.edu/guides/AfricanAmerican4.html), Date Accessed: 18 April 2005.

<sup>17</sup>Laurene Sharp, *100 Years of the Black Man in Fort Worth* (Fort Worth: L. Sharp & Co., 1973).

<sup>18</sup>Barry Trent Sandlin, "The 1921 Butcher Workmen Strike in Fort Worth, TX" (M.A. thesis, University of Texas at Arlington, 1988).



over a thirty-year time span.<sup>19</sup> Scott Cummings published another academic publication that looked at residential segregation and the subsequent effects of desegregation of the Fort Worth suburb of Rosedale. Cummings's work, *Left Behind in Rosedale: Race Relations and the Collapse of Community Institutions*, appeared in 1998 and focused on the breakdown of an incorporated white suburban neighborhood after African Americans began settling there in the late 1960s.<sup>20</sup> The exception to all of the previous publications is the book *Princes Shall Come Out of Egypt, Texas, and Fort Worth*, by Reby Cary. Cary's book, to date, stands as the most definitive work regarding the entire Fort Worth African American experience. Cary begins with the very first time an African stepped foot on Texas soil during the sixteenth century as a European's slave and continues to chart the course of the African American past in Texas, focusing mainly on Fort Worth.<sup>21</sup> It must also be noted that Cary not only wrote the most definitive book about Fort Worth African Americans to date, he was an active participant in the city's civil rights history. Cary's activities are discussed further in this thesis.

No single work, however, considers all aspects of black community development within the city, and where the city currently stands concerning African Americans' place. This thesis seeks to delve further and broader into the city's black history throughout a hundred year time span to describe Fort Worth's African American community. By keeping the historical focus on the century between 1875—when Reconstruction ended—until 1980, the reader will gain a fuller knowledge and understanding of the transition

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<sup>19</sup>Marjorie Clark, "Racial Residential Segregation: Tracking Three Decades in a Single City" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Texas, 1990).

<sup>20</sup>Scott Cummings, *Left Behind in Rosedale: Race Relations and the Collapse of Community Institutions* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998).

<sup>21</sup>Reby Cary, *Princes Shall Come out of Egypt, Texas, and Fort Worth* (Pittsburgh, PA: Dorrance Publishing Co., Inc., 2002).

from freedman to city resident and the opportunities and obstacles African Americans faced. Fort Worth's black heritage is rich, and this study tells not only of the African American experience but also of the white community's attitudes as one race interacted with the other. To reveal the stories, this work is divided into seven chapters, each of which covers a main theme. The first chapter is a quick overview of African American urban history. The second chapter is a brief sketch of Fort Worth's history and where African Americans fit within the city's demographics and residential patterns. From there, Chapter Two will break down the African American experience within specific topics. The first topic discussed is residential segregation, especially relating to the city's racial boundaries and the events that occurred after the desegregation of all-white neighborhoods.

The third chapter focuses on the city's economy and the various occupations open and closed to African Americans through time. Black business leaders rose within the community and helped encourage entrepreneurs to open stores that eventually serviced both white and black clientele. In the fourth chapter, Fort Worth's black community tackles the huge obstacle of the right to vote and their place as political leaders. At first, white politicians used the African American vote to elect favored leaders for the white community, not the black interest. African Americans wanted their voices and opinions heard and to have political influence. To achieve this goal, the city's black community created organizations and rallied for political power.

Political organizations were not the only communal groups that brought African American residents together. Chapter Five describes how and where black residents started their own churches, schools, and fraternal organizations within the city. These

associations not only connected the black community but also created a support system within the city for African American residents. The sixth chapter combines all the previous themes together to discuss a major subject within the Texas city. As previously discussed, Texas is a state with connections to a western economy and industry but with southern racial attitudes. These issues arose often in the growing city's history. The chapter looks at Fort Worth's race relations, especially relating to racial violence, school desegregation, responses to segregation within the city, and civil rights activity. The intended outcome for these layers of topics is to create a fuller picture of Fort Worth's history through the black experience.

A case study similar in nature to this thesis is Thomas Hanchett's *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975*.<sup>22</sup> As Hanchett looked at the development of Charlotte, North Carolina, he described a city that grew rapidly during the post-Civil War years as black and white citizens interacted with one another. Fort Worth is also a city that developed after the war, but while Charlotte was a mixed city initially, Fort Worth started as a principally white village with a few slaves owned by wealthier residents. After the war and Reconstruction, Fort Worth's residents struggled as they slowly accepted the newly freed blacks in the community. While the city grew and evolved, white citizens found themselves in a new situation wherein they needed to accept African Americans in the city or face a large social rift that would divide the community. At the same time, Fort Worth blacks faced a similar situation because they had to decide to fight for equal citizenship or fall to the social

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<sup>22</sup>Thomas Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

fringes. While Texas blacks adapted to their new place within society, the city of Fort Worth adapted to them.

The “New South,” as a term given to southern states after the end of the Civil War and Reconstruction, depicted a change in the states’ economic and social makeup. Ideally, this intangible idea promoted an idea of change for the better, but the war left the southern states’ economic and social structures in shambles. On average, southern states dependent on agricultural revenue saw a decrease in productivity and profits mainly due to lack of slave labor and a sporadic rise in use of machinery. By 1890, the majority of the nations’ industrialization remained in the northern and midwestern states. Texas, although the largest in land mass, was the seventh most populated state in the country with 2,235,523 residents in 1890. Economically, however, Texas ranked eighteenth among the most industrialized states.<sup>23</sup>

Socially, southern whites during Reconstruction faced a world in which blacks were supposed to be their equals. By some accounts, the transition was easier for some cities than for others. Hanchett discovered that Charlotte’s mixed population adapted quickly to emancipation primarily because, historically, blacks and whites lived near each other in the community. Compared to Charlotte, did Fort Worth African Americans adapt and thrive well in a city developed mainly in the New South? How did the new city’s white population deal with the issues that arose with the emergence of newly freed African Americans? Looking statistically at Tarrant County’s first ten years, there was not a large slave population. Therefore, it seems as if the community would be more willing to accept blacks. Did African Americans have a better chance for economic,

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<sup>23</sup>Historical Census Browser, retrieved from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>, Date Accessed: 9 May 2006.

social, and educational opportunities than what they experienced in cities like Atlanta or other southern cities that were well-established before the Civil War? Does the timeframe of a southern city's development directly correspond to the treatment of African Americans later in the city's history and to the prevailing racial attitudes? Does the geography of an American city even matter to determine the type of urban experience African Americans encountered during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? The answer, especially regarding Fort Worth, is no. Fort Worth was still a city in a southern slave state. The white citizens of the city were angered by the results of the war and especially about Reconstruction, which hurt the economy and population. After the war, Texas took five years to accept the federal terms of absolution to return to the Union. The war was largely due to the slavery debate. If the state's reaction to the war and the federal government's actions during Reconstruction are any indication of white feelings toward emancipation, it becomes easier to see how Fort Worth slipped quickly into segregation and racial intolerance.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>For more information about Texas during the Civil War and Reconstruction refer to W. A. Fletcher's *Rebel Private, Front and Rear: Memoirs of a Confederate Soldier* (New York: Dutton, 1908); Charles W. Ramsdell, *Reconstruction in Texas* (New York: Columbia University, 1910); Joel H. Silbey, *Storm over Texas: The Annexation Controversy and the Road to Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Randolph B. Campbell, *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Alwyn Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform: Texas Politics, 1876-1906* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971); Randolph B. Campbell, *Grass-Roots Reconstruction in Texas, 1865-1880* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997); and William Curtis Nunn, *Texas Under the Carpetbaggers* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962).

## CHAPTER TWO

### The City's Beginnings

The city of Fort Worth, Texas, originated in 1849 as a frontier outpost on the named after General William Jenkins Worth, a hero of the Mexican War. The military post served to act as a way station for Fort Graham sixty miles to the south and protect the newly annexed state of Texas.<sup>1</sup> Migrants moved west into Indian-inhabited land, but the fort never fulfilled its intended use. Frontier boundaries continued to extend west, and federal soldiers left to occupy newer forts constructed along the ever-expanding boundary. As the fort became dilapidated and rarely used, settlers moved into the area and took over the site in 1853, renaming the area Fort Town.<sup>2</sup> Three years later, the budding city became the county seat for Tarrant County. Fort Worth did not claim sprawling plantations or families with large slave holdings, but the earliest settlers brought their slaves with them.<sup>3</sup>

When the United States Congress resolved to annex the Texas Republic in 1845, the congressmen agreed that the new state would stay a slave state since the Republic of Texas' congress allowed uninhibited slavery. By 1850, there were 58,161 slaves in Texas, congregated in the eastern part of the state. Tarrant County did not hold many

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<sup>1</sup>Richard F. Selcer, "Setting the Record Straight: Fort Worth and the Historians," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 100 (January 1997), 361-379.

<sup>2</sup>Richard F. Selcer, *The Fort That Became a City: An Illustrated Reconstruction of Fort Worth, Texas, 1849-1853* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1995), 137.

<sup>3</sup>Julian Garrett, *Fort Worth: A Frontier Triumph* (Austin, TX: Encino Press, 1972; reprint, Fort Worth: Texas Christian University, 1996), 127.

slaves, only 65, a mere 0.1 percent of the total slave population in Texas.<sup>4</sup> Despite the low numbers, the fact remained that white settlers in Tarrant County held slaves, whose number increased drastically within a decade. Yet in 1850, Tarrant County's resident population consisted of only 664 people, 9.8 percent of whom were slaves.<sup>5</sup>

Two of Fort Town's earliest and most renowned residents moved to the area in 1854, bringing their families, animals, material goods, and slaves. Captain Ephraim Daggett built his house where Main, Houston, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Street converge today in Fort Worth. (Fig. 1 and 2) He brought many slaves with him, but the number is not specified. Julian Garrett, author of *Fort Worth: A Frontier Triumph*, describes Daggett's entrance into the small town: "When Daggett's caravan arrived in Fort Town it was an entire day of excitement, because it came in relays. First came the carriage with Mrs. Daggett, and then a two-seated buggy driven by Captain Daggett close behind. There were several wagons with slaves, household goods and tools. In late afternoon, a few slaves appeared driving a herd of dairy cows. Following them were young Negro boys with flocks of turkeys, geese and ducks. Later came slaves driving a few horses and mules."<sup>6</sup> Garrett's description suggests at least fifteen slaves came with the Daggetts. Colonel Nathaniel Terry brought thirty-eight slaves when he and his family settled in Fort Town near the North Fort Worth railway tracks and Exchange Avenue East. (Fig. 3) Garrett describes Terry's arrival as two wagons carrying thirty-six slaves followed by "carriages with two pretty girls [presumably white] and their mammies."

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<sup>4</sup>It must be noted that there were free blacks in the Republic of Texas. Refer to Harold Schoen, "The Free Negro in the Republic of Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 40 (July 1936): 26-34.

<sup>5</sup>Historical Census Browser, retrieved from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>, Date Accessed: 9 May 2006.

<sup>6</sup>Garrett, 127-130.

Fig. 1. The black circle indicates the approximate location of Captain Ephraim Daggett's original house in Tarrant County in 1854. The map shown here is from 1885, where the area became Elliott and Roe Lumber Yard. Neighboring blocks contain businesses, factories, and African American housing. The lower right block labeled "115," between S. Rusk and E. 12<sup>th</sup> Street, has the words "Negro Shanties" along the bottom edge. Reprinted from Digital Sanborn Maps 1867-1970, Fort Worth, Texas 1885, sheet 8.



Fig. 2. This map portrays the same area of Fort Worth where Captain Ephraim Daggett first settled in relation to the current city layout. Reprinted from Google Maps.com, <http://maps.google.com/maps?q=Fort+Worth,+TX>, Date Accessed: 3 December 2006.

Fig. 3. The black rectangle represents the approximate location where Colonel Nathaniel Terry and his family settled in Fort Town in 1854 in relation to the current city of Fort Worth. Reprinted from Google Maps.com.

According to historian Reby Cary, Colonel Middleton Tate Johnson brought the most slaves, although the exact number is unknown.<sup>8</sup> Two other slave owners in the area were Paul Isbell and Charles Turner. The number of slaves they owned respectively is not recorded.<sup>9</sup> Despite this lack of information, it is clear that slavery was a thriving institution, even in a blooming city. By 1860, the number of slaves in Tarrant County rose to 850 from the previous count of 65 in 1850. Two main factors contributed to this 1207.7 percent swell in slaves. The first explanation is simply natural reproduction,

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<sup>8</sup>Cary found reference to Terry's slaves in James Farber's *Fort Worth in the Civil War*. Reby Cary, *Princes Shall Come Out of Egypt, Texas, and Fort Worth* (Pittsburgh, PA: Dorrance Publishing Co., Inc., 2002), 150.

<sup>9</sup>Leonard Sanders, *How Fort Worth Became the Texasmost City* (Fort Worth, TX: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1973), 14.

while the second factor was the settlement of Fort Town. As settlers moved into the area, they brought slaves from other parts of Texas or other Southern states. The increase in farming also raised the demand to buy more slaves from markets in New Orleans, Galveston, and Houston to provide labor to farm the land. The entire state saw a dramatic rise in slave numbers. Between the 1850 and 1860 censuses, Texas experienced an increase of 124,405 slaves—a rise of 213.9 percent—with 21,878 total slaveholders. Texas's large slaveholding population and the state's agricultural dependence upon slave labor set the scene for future racial tension and economic troubles in the years following the Civil War.<sup>10</sup>

The Civil War wreaked havoc on southern cities, including Fort Worth. The city's economy sagged while resources such as food and money diminished. The stress caused by the war and Reconstruction caused citizens to leave to seek opportunities elsewhere. From 1860 to 1870, Tarrant County's population decreased from 6,020 residents to 5,788, while at one point Fort Worth's population dramatically dropped to 175 residents.<sup>11</sup> The leading powers also changed after the war. Between 1867 and 1869, a Union-appointed government controlled Texas affairs while the state underwent mandatory Reconstruction. During Reconstruction, Fort Worth citizens became angered about the federal presence in the state, dictating the rebuilding of Texas' economy, and they directed their anger at white northerners, Republicans, and former slaves. Texas, along with the other former Confederate states, had to ratify new state constitutions in order to regain admittance to the Union. On 30 March 1870, five years after the war

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<sup>10</sup>Historical Census Browser.

<sup>11</sup>Janet Schmelzer, "Fort Worth, Texas," <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/FF/hdf1.html>, Date Accessed: 5 December 2006.

ended, Texas once again became a part of the United States. Fort Worth became an official city in 1873 and elected Dr. A. L. Burts as its first mayor.<sup>12</sup>

Even before the Civil War ended, slave owners knew the day was approaching when freeing their slaves would no longer be a personal decision. Although President Abraham Lincoln announced the Emancipation Proclamation on 1 January 1863, many southern blacks did not realize they were free unless their owner told them or they heard the news from other sources. Sam Jones Washington, an ex-slave who later moved to Fort Worth, remained with his master, Sam Young, after the Civil War because he did not know he was free. In an interview during the 1930s, Washington recalled how he remained ignorant about his freedom for a few years. “One day Massa say to me, ‘After this, you gits fifteen dollars the month wages.’”<sup>13</sup> Without realizing he could choose whether to stay or leave, Washington remained with his former master and worked for him for another three years. Young, similar to other former slaveholders, thought that offering a paid wage would encourage their former slaves to continue working. Washington portrayed both possibilities that freedmen chose. He stayed and worked for his master, earning monthly wages. After only a few years, however, Washington knew with certainty that he wanted to explore the world outside his old master’s farm.

Some slave traders, such as a man known only as Carroll, brought their slave property from other southern states and left them in Texas to fend for themselves. Historian Zeke Handler interviewed Jamie Wilson, a slave owned by Carroll, in the 1930s. Wilson related the story of how Carroll left Wilson, Wilson’s mother, and one

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Sam Jones Washington, in Andrew Waters, ed., *I Was Born in Slavery* (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 2003), 55.

hundred other slaves in an area between Fort Worth and Springtown right before the Civil War. The family wandered around the region, uncertain of where to go or what to do. They did not know the area and were unsure of their future. The majority of whites after the war despised blacks and no longer wanted them around. After walking aimlessly, looking for food, Wilson and his mother passed a white family's house. The family decided to take them in and give them food in exchange for a year's work.<sup>14</sup>

The majority of African Americans in Texas did not have the rude awakening that Wilson and his family experienced. In fact, slaves in Texas did not know they were free until 19 June 1865 when Union general Gordon Granger announced the news as soon as he arrived in Galveston. Slaves across Texas had mixed emotions of joy and sadness when they heard about their freedom. Millie Williams, a former slave, recalled how her friends and family reacted. "There sho' was a mighty party when the slaves knows they's free. They hug one 'nother and almost tear their clothes off. Some cryin' for the husband, and some cryin' for the chillen."<sup>15</sup>

After the news spread that they were free, many former slaves left Texas and headed north, including some from Fort Worth. A few slaves, such as those previously owned by Colonel Johnson, stayed on the plantations. Johnson even gave a plot of land to his former slaves to live on after their freedom. This land later became the African American suburb of Johnson Station, just outside of Fort Worth. Betty Farrow had a similar experience after the Civil War when a fight over land killed her master, Alex Clark. Farrow stayed with Clark's wife and never thought about leaving. "When the war

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<sup>14</sup>Mack Williams, ed., "Memories of Tarrant County Slaves," *In Old Fort Worth: The Story of a City and its People as Published in the News-Tribune in 1976 and 1977* (Fort Worth, TX: Mack H. Williams and Madeline C. Williams, 1977), 13.

<sup>15</sup>Millie Williams, in Waters, 79-83.

was over . . . we'uns stayed on workin'. I's don't 'member bein' told I's free. They might have told my mammy. I's don't see no diff'ence, we'uns just stayed. 'Twas our home, and they was good to us, 'twarnt any reason to leave."<sup>16</sup>

After 1865, many black Texans remained with their previous masters, as did other freedmen in neighboring slave states. Freedom for them seemed almost like an intangible dream after generations of servitude and oppression. How could they be free and leave if all former southern slaves knew was overseers, slave catchers, and shelter and food provided for them? If they left, blacks did not know if other people would catch and return them to their owners. Mostly due to timidity and the unknown, Texas African Americans did not readily jump at the thought of equality in the 1860s and 1870s. It was such a new concept after centuries of enslavement that the idea of absolute freedom was a difficult idea to grasp, especially with negative white racial attitudes all around them. Many black Texans stayed with the people, places, and activities they knew, allowing themselves to be immersed in their new freedom slowly. The choice to remain in agricultural work kept many Fort Worth blacks in the country surrounding the town, prolonging the inevitable change in the community's racial composition for a few more years.<sup>17</sup>

As African Americans began moving into Fort Worth in the late nineteenth century, white residents accepted them, provided they remained in segregated neighborhoods. For some Texas towns, this form of acceptance was relatively progressive. In some areas such as Comanche County, whites actually forced black

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<sup>16</sup>Betty Farrow, in *ibid.*, 126-27.

<sup>17</sup>This information gathered from discussions in slave narratives and in W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Library of America, 1986).

residents to leave the area. In late July 1886, whites ordered blacks to leave, under penalty of death, from Comanche County and the towns of De Leon, Bibbs, Snipe Springs, and Fleming, after allegations of multiple offenses by blacks against white women and little girls in surrounding counties.<sup>18</sup> Whites hung signs in the towns that said, “No negroes allowed in this town.” As a result of this forced migration, twenty-three African Americans came to Fort Worth via the Texas and Pacific Railroad to seek refuge.<sup>19</sup> Those who came were willing to work and found jobs quickly in the cotton fields, but this did not ease their minds about why they were forced out of their homes. Two black men interviewed for a newspaper article told the truth about how they and their community felt about the situation. Luke Jefferson was fifty years old and had lived in Comanche County for sixteen years. “I tell you the colored folks are scared. There has been a heap of bad niggers in the county and we have got to suffer for them. Four men came to my house Monday and told me I had to go and all other darkies around me. They had guns and told me they meant business. The white folks is awful mad and will kill niggers that stay.”<sup>20</sup>

Joe Butler, a thirty-two-year-old mulatto man thought that the people in Comanche County would eventually get over their anger and fear and let the good blacks, who behaved and followed the rules, return to their homes. While Butler agreed that those who broke the rules and hurt others deserved to die by hanging, he believed this punishment resulted unfairly from their actions. In addition, Butler also believed

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<sup>18</sup>“Negroes Ordered Away,” *New York Times*, 30 July 1886, 1.

<sup>19</sup>Between 1880 and 1890, the black population in Comanche County dropped from a total of 79 to a staggering 8. Historical Census Browser.

<sup>20</sup>“Negroes Ordered Away.”

that the blacks who behaved badly toward white women and children were newcomers to the area. In his defense, Butler's comments sought to assure white citizens that only those blacks who were new to the community would perform such acts, not the people who had lived in the area longer.<sup>21</sup>

About a month after blacks came to Fort Worth after being driven out of nearby communities, the city's whites became equally annoyed when some of the refugee African Americans were idle and caused problems around the city.

There is a determination that refugee negroes in any considerable numbers shall not locate in towns and cities that have not hitherto had many black citizens. The town negroes, as a rule, are not good citizens. They congregate in low quarters of the city and make life almost unendurable to whites living within earshot of them. The recent exodus from Comanche County and the influx of numbers from other counties, caused by the drought, have added largely to the population of half-idle negroes, who quickly become vicious . . . . In this city the police are kept busy arresting gangs of negro loafers who have lately arrived. The negro quarters are being extended beyond limits hitherto known, and several property owners here have been expostulated with for renting to this class . . . . Negroes who should be in the common fields are found idle in the places of vice and in many cases making night hideous by their orgies . . . . How to get rid of the surplus of undesirable blacks is the problem now being anxiously considered.<sup>22</sup>

Fort Worth's white citizens became nervous about the sudden increase of blacks within the city. As the article insisted, the city had never experienced such a flood of African Americans. Between 1880 and 1890, the black population in Fort Worth doubled, from 2,160 black residents to 4,316. In direct reaction to the need for housing, African Americans began to penetrate areas that whites believed was their domain. Segregated property boundaries began being stretched, making white citizens uneasy, because they

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>"War on Idle Blacks," *New York Times*, 7 September 1886, 1.



might soon live next door to an African American—an experience with which whites in the city had never dealt before.<sup>23</sup>

African American Fort Worth neighborhoods in the late nineteenth century lay primarily on the east side of town. The 1890 city directory commonly listed large numbers of black residents as living on the east side of numbered streets, Weatherford Avenue, and Bluff Avenue. Other residential addresses included Rusk, Calhoun, Elm, Jones, Taylor, Harding, Louisiana Avenue, and Missouri Avenue. An African American's name listed with a west side address indicated that they lived with their white employer. Out of the 1,047 African Americans listed in the 1890 city directory, approximately 9.46 per cent lived with their employer, working as cooks, porters, nurses, or domestics.<sup>24</sup> The majority of blacks in Fort Worth lived in the Third Ward, which stretched from 9<sup>th</sup> Street and Jones to East Lancaster. This area of the city not only housed the majority of Irish immigrants but also included Hell's Half Acre, Fort Worth's redlight district. (Fig. 4)

There were two other pockets of African Americans around the city. Stop Six was a little town formerly known as Cowanville whose name changed because it was the sixth stop on the electric interurban trolley between Fort Worth and Dallas. Terry's Plantation was located on Colonel Nathaniel Terry's original plot of land between Samuel Avenue and the Trinity River by the railroad tracks. (Fig. 3)

Just as white Fort Worth citizens did not want to have black residential neighbors, they also preferred to be separate in the afterlife. On 18 April 1878, two aldermen,

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<sup>23</sup>Historical Census Browser.

<sup>24</sup>*D.S. Clark's City Directory of the Inhabitants, Manufacturing Establishments, Institutions, Business Firms, etc. in the City of Fort Worth, TX* (Fort Worth, TX: TX Printing and Lithography Co., 1890), 57-276.

Fig. 4. The first figure is a strip of Jones Street from 14<sup>th</sup> through 17<sup>th</sup> Street in 1885. The second figure portrays the same area, although including 9<sup>th</sup> through 13<sup>th</sup> Street, in present day Fort Worth. Reprinted respectively from Digital Sanborn Maps 1867-1970, Fort Worth, Texas 1885, sheet 10 and Google Maps.com, <http://maps.google.com/maps?q=Fort+Worth,+TX>, Date Accessed: 18 February 2007.

Alderman Jackson and Alderman Holmes, both white, suggested to the City Council to build a community cemetery, rather than separate ones for blacks and whites. The two men stated in the *Fort Worth Daily Democrat* that, “after death, it mattered little where a man was buried, or who happened to be his next door neighbor, and as a matter of economy, he would favor the purchase of a burial ground for the use of the general public, irrespective of rank or color.” The other councilmen, however, did not see the situation in such economical terms as Jackson and Holmes. The following argument

ensued in which an editorial in the same issue of the *Daily Democrat* proclaimed that “Holmes and Jackson may not object to being buried close up alongside of a negro, but we venture the assertion that seven-eighths of the white citizens of the Fort would object.”<sup>25</sup>

Fort Worth’s segregated residential boundaries gave way during the two African American migrations in the United States between 1915 to 1930 and 1940 to 1970. As the economy began shifting toward industrial production rather than agriculture, thousands of African Americans moved from rural areas to urban centers. The transition from a predominately rural country to an urban one created upheaval within established neighborhoods. Change in Fort Worth’s residential layout came whether white citizens wanted it to or not; however, this transition was not quick. In 1938, the Fort Worth City Council voted to change the location of a proposed low-cost black housing project near a white community based on the argument that “the Negroes do not want to encroach on white resident’s territory but want another noncontroversial site be selected.”<sup>26</sup> By making it appear that African Americans preferred segregation between neighborhoods, the city council delayed even the slightest hint of residential integration for a few more years. This accomplished setback only created a false impression of cooperation between the city’s racial groups. Continuing to ignore the problem at hand only led to further tension between the races throughout the city.

As African Americans continued moving to Fort Worth, they settled directly in the central city, forcing white residents to face a world of residential integration. White families already living in Fort Worth moved out to the suburbs and those migrating to

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<sup>25</sup>“Don’t Mix Them,” *Fort Worth Daily Democrat*, 18 April 1878.

<sup>26</sup>“Fort Worth Addition Fights Negro Residents,” *Dallas Morning News*, 24 November 1938, 3.

Fort Worth immediately settled in suburbs. This is not to say that all blacks lived in the hub of Fort Worth and whites lived in a ring around the city, but this occurred fully enough for the trend to be given a name: “dark core—white ring” or “white flight.”<sup>27</sup> This residential segregation was the main starting point for the continued segregation in Fort Worth—directly affecting schools and businesses.

Relegated to the less than desirable locations in town, African American fell victim to further discrimination in terms of housing prices and property taxes. In a study held in 1968, William S. Hendon discovered that between 1958 and 1963 African Americans on average paid approximately \$2,000 more for a house than white residents did in Fort Worth. Added to this type of financial discrimination, property tax assessors evaluated black housing at higher prices over white housing, no matter what the condition of the house was like. By claiming a higher property value, African American homeowners’ property taxes were higher than white homeowners’ taxes, even though many times black housing was more rundown than whites.<sup>28</sup>

Because African Americans could not earn as much money as whites, their neighborhoods literally became slums when blacks could not afford to maintain their houses or move to a better area. By 1951, there were fourteen predominantly African American neighborhoods in Fort Worth where residential housing was small, dilapidated, and lacked indoor plumbing in most of those areas. Fort Worth city officials realized the poor state these neighborhoods were in, and with help from development groups such as

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<sup>27</sup>Earl Brown, *Cowtown 1977: A Social Analysis of Fort Worth, Texas* (Fort Worth: Department of Sociology, Texas Wesleyan College, 1978), 89.

<sup>28</sup>William S. Hendon, “Discrimination against Negro Homeowners in Property Tax Assessment,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 27, no. 2 (1968), 125-132.

the National Urban League, the number of dilapidated houses and outhouses diminished rapidly by 1970 (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. Housing Conditions for Fort Worth by Total and Non-White, 1950

	Good Condition With all Plumbing		Dilapidated and Lacking some or all Plumbing	
	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)
Total	62,448	71.5	24,879	28.5
Non-White	2,955	27.7	7,713	72.3

*Source:* Earl Brown, *Cowtown 1977: A Social Analysis of Fort Worth, Texas* (Fort Worth: Department of Sociology, Texas Wesleyan College, 1978), 558-61.

Table 2. Housing Conditions for Fort Worth by Total and Black, 1970

	With all Plumbing		Lacking some or all Plumbing	
	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)
Total	136,171	97.9	2,930	2.1
Black	20,787	95.7	931	4.3

*Source:* Brown, *Cowtown 1977*, 553-55.

Even before the city began to implement true residential integration in the 1970s and 1980s, whites always seemed threatened when blacks moved into their predominantly white neighborhoods. Houses and cars were bombed in the 1920s by the Ku Klux Klan and African Americans were hanged in effigy as threats to leave the community.<sup>29</sup> On 19 June 1939, a crowd of five hundred white Fort Worth citizens attacked the residence of Otis Flake and his family in protest against the black family living in an otherwise all-white neighborhood.<sup>30</sup> The Flake family lived there less than a week, and police kept a close eye on the area as they dispersed crowds that assembled on nearby street corners. The mob gathered and attacked the Flakes' house, despite the

<sup>29</sup>“Negroes Told to Vacate Houses,” *Fort Worth Press*, 10 July 1926.

<sup>30</sup>“Fort Worth Crowd Raids Negro Home,” *Dallas Morning News*, 20 June 1939, 6.

policemen's watch over the previous four nights. Men took furniture and items out of the house while the police were helpless to restrain the mob due to the sheer size of the crowd. All of the night's violence resulted from an outcry against African Americans encroaching on what had previously been all white neighborhoods. Even seventeen years later African Americans fought to gain acceptance into what had been predominantly white communities. In 1956 when Lloyd and Macie Austin, a family with a young daughter, moved into the Riverside community in Fort Worth, their new white neighbors picketed in front of their house and threatened to kill the family.<sup>31</sup> The family refused to move and the protests died down, but this was only one example of similar events that occurred all over Texas and the United States. African Americans constantly battled white protests when they integrated all-white neighborhoods. Somehow, the black families were the ones to blame for the white riots, protests, and bombings that occurred.

Residential segregation and the problems and setbacks associated with residential integration between white and African American residents were only the beginning story of Fort Worth's African American past. By 1865, all blacks in Texas were freedmen and slavery was abolished forever. For the previous twenty years, Texas only knew slavery and prejudice. As the rest of the post-Civil War nation celebrated or despised the new segment of the American public, each city had to adjust to this permanent change in the social structure. Fort Worth suddenly faced new difficulties as a southern city that blossomed after the Civil War. Previously, white citizens worried about slave revolts and whether Texas should withdraw from the Union along with their southern neighbors. Now, both white and black Fort Worth citizens shared new concerns, which affected both

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<sup>31</sup>Tim Madigan, "Showdown on Judkins Street," [www.kri.com/papers/greatstories/worth/jimcrow1.html](http://www.kri.com/papers/greatstories/worth/jimcrow1.html); Date Accessed: 18 April 2005.

racism, although both approached each issue from opposite ends. Suddenly, free blacks competed on the same job market, opened new businesses, required a residential section of the city, and demanded equal rights including voting opportunities, education, and employment. The nation's social and economic structures changed rapidly by 1875 and Fort Worth had to respond. The city thrived economically but struggled to keep up socially, along with other southern cities, as African Americans within the city found their voice and their strength to demand more than simply the bare minimum. As blacks in Fort Worth adapted to their new freedom and sought equality, a large majority of Fort Worth's white citizens found it difficult to adapt along with them. African Americans found themselves in a new position within the city and, through the decades, they experienced both success and failure.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Obstacles and Successes Within Fort Worth's Expanding Economy

The years after 1870 saw a tremendous growth in Fort Worth's economy and population. The 1880 census shows that there was an increase of 326.2 percent in Tarrant County's population as the total number jumped from 5,788 residents in 1870 to 24,671 in 1880. Two main factors contributed to this huge rise in population: railroads and the meatpacking industry. The Texas and Pacific Railroad came to Fort Worth on 19 July 1876, and other rail lines came to the city such as the Missouri-Kansas-Texas, the Santa Fe, and the St. Louis Southwestern, to name a few.<sup>1</sup> Railroads brought a larger commercial market to the city. Previously, Fort Worth was a central spot for cattle drivers. Now with the railroad, beef products were shipped faster to the rest of the nation and created a boom in the cattle industry. Armour and Company and Swift and Company, the two largest meatpacking companies in the nation, came to Fort Worth by the 1890s. With the presence of two well-known meatpacking companies, Fort Worth saw a boom in the beef industry and an increase in employment opportunities. By 1880, Tarrant County had fifty-eight manufacturing establishments, ranking the county as the tenth most industrial Texas county. Ten years later, the city's manufacturing businesses soared to 321.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For more information on the railroad coming to Fort Worth, see Sandra L. Myres, "Fort Worth, 1870-1900," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 72 (October 1968), 200-222.

<sup>2</sup>Historical Census Browser, retrieved from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>, Date Accessed: 9 May 2006.



The increase in businesses created a comparable rise in employment. The 1890 census shows that out of 41,142 residents in Tarrant County, 2,718 people worked within the new industrial areas in the city compared to 163 employees ten years earlier. Average weekly wages for employees were approximately \$1.32 higher than the state average. White males in positions as officers, firm members, and clerks within manufacturing businesses on average earned \$17.68 per week while their female counterparts earned \$11.00 per week. Skilled and unskilled workers in Tarrant County, while earning less, still brought in a higher wage than did other Texas laborers. Males sixteen years of age and older received \$13.75 per week in Fort Worth compared to the Texas average of \$8.78. Comparatively, females sixteen years of age and older working in Fort Worth industrial companies earned \$6.22 per week while children received \$3.36 per week for their work. Overall, the manufacturing economy in Fort Worth began to flourish, bringing more opportunity for both black and white workers to earn a decent paycheck, mainly due to the newly built railroads. The railroads also brought economic opportunities to other areas of commerce, especially agriculture.<sup>3</sup>

The land surrounding Fort Worth grew crops that included mainly of cotton, corn, and wheat. The farming economy in Texas rose, and the number of farms increased from 534 in 1870 to 2,791 in 1880. A better economy brought in more people to the area as more job opportunities sprang up, especially for African Americans. Within ten years, the black population in Fort Worth almost tripled from 705 at the end of the Civil War to 2,160 in 1880. By the turn of the century Fort Worth packinghouses employed a large number of citizens, including African Americans. Ex-slaves like Giles Smith and Henry

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<sup>3</sup>Historical Census Browser. These numbers reflect a combined total for white and African American workers.

Probasco, came back to the city to work forty years after becoming free and worked for the packing companies.<sup>4</sup> Not only were there jobs in manufacturing as technology produced machines that required unskilled labor to tend, but sharecropping also became increasingly dominant throughout the southern states.

A little less than half of the farms in Tarrant County were engaged in sharecropping in the 1880 census, with 1,159 farms rented for a share of total products and profit. Sharecropping was not solely a white landowner and black tenant ordeal. Black and white families rented shares of land from large farms and grew crops. In exchange for land to live on and use to raise crops, tenants gave a portion of either their earnings at market or their actual product to the landowner as payment. While this gave blacks more occupational venues and the ability to use the knowledge they learned as slaves working in the fields, sharecropping soon became closely compared to slavery.<sup>5</sup>

The entire system created a vicious cycle of debt which most tenants could not repay. Most sharecroppers did not own their own farming equipment, which included tools, machinery, and seeds. To obtain these farm implements, sharecroppers had two options. Either they borrowed from their landlords for a monetary amount which they paid back after the harvest, or they bought the items at a general store on a tab. In both cases, the amount due generally cost more than what the sharecropper earned at market after paying rent to their landlords and therefore accrued through the seasons.

Landowners also occasionally created excuses to collect more money or produce from

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<sup>4</sup>*Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938*; WPA Slave Narrative Project, Texas Narratives, Volume 16, Part 4; Federal Writers' Project, United States Work Projects Administration (USWPA); Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; [on-line database]; available from [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/S?ammem/mesnbib:@field\(STATE+@od1\(Texas\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/S?ammem/mesnbib:@field(STATE+@od1(Texas))), accessed 16 February 2006. [Hereafter referred to as USWPA].

<sup>5</sup>Historical Census Browser.

their tenants, thereby preventing sharecroppers from making a large profit at the market.

In a recent radio documentary concerning black experiences in the southern states during the Jim Crow era, Amelia Robinson related an incident that typified what sharecroppers encountered with the landowners.

For instance, here's a man with ten children. In December, he's told . . . to come to the big house and have a settlement. Okay, the settlement would go like this. "Well, John, you made twenty-five bails of cotton. And now you know that the old mule died, had to have another mule, got to pay for that. Now John, your daughter took sick and you called me and told me you had to take her to the doctor and I had to call the doctor up. You know it costs some money for that, so I'll take that out. Now John, you're almost out of debt, but you're not out of debt yet."<sup>6</sup>

Many sharecroppers never earned enough money from their work to pay off their debts and buy their own land, and often when the fathers died, they passed on the debt to their children and grandchildren.<sup>7</sup>

Not all African Americans in Fort Worth fell into the snare of sharecropping. The first black to open his own business in Fort Worth was John Pratt.<sup>8</sup> He opened a blacksmith shop on the corner of Weatherford and Rusk Street. The shop mainly catered to the black community and was not well frequented until Major K. M. Van Zandt, a leading white city figure, returned from the Civil War. Van Zandt opened a store downtown and went to Pratt's store, which brought other customers to Pratt. This boost from a well-known white figure within the community prompted a rise in patrons and

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<sup>6</sup>*Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell about Life in the Segregated South* (New York: New Press, 2001), compact disc.

<sup>7</sup>For more information on sharecropping, refer to Donna L. Franklin's *Ensuring Inequality: The Structural Transformation of the African-American Family* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); David Eugene Conrad, *The Forgotten Farmers: The Story of Sharecroppers in the New Deal* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1965); and Gerald David Jaynes, *Branches Without Roots: Genesis of the Black Working Class in the American South, 1862-1882* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>8</sup>Ben H. Standifer, Jr., "The Black Business District: 1900-1940," (class paper at Texas Christian University, 1998).

signified the beginning of white businesses occasionally helping black businesses in early Fort Worth.

Between 1870 and 1880, job opportunities opened for everyone, but black positions remained limited mostly to unskilled laborers such as woodcutters, bootblacks, janitors, slaughters, maids, and cattle drivers. Other jobs for blacks included cooks, midwives, blacksmiths, herb doctors, farmers, and miners.<sup>9</sup> The city government and other city services such as the police force continued to bar blacks from being hired, even though in 1886 there was only one policeman per ward in the city. Despite this apparent need, the city only hired white men for police positions.<sup>10</sup>

At the end of the nineteenth century, a high percentage of the city's African American occupations became identifiable by gender. (Table 3) Men tended to be mostly porters and general laborers, while women worked as nurses, cooks, or laundresses. A porter's job could consist of a number of duties, but the work hardly

Table 3. Top Jobs for Male and Female Colored Workers in Fort Worth, 1890

Primary Gender	Occupation	No.	Per Cent
Male	porter	106	10.12
Male	railroader	39	3.72
Male	waiter	35	3.34
Male	hostler	16	1.53
Female	laundress	156	14.90
Female	nurse	10	.96
Coed	laborer	180	17.19
Coed	cook	109	10.41

*Source: D.S. Clark's City Directory of the Inhabitants, Manufacturing Establishments, Institutions, Business Firms, etc. in the City of Fort Worth, Texas* (Fort Worth, TX: TX Printing and Lithography Co., 1890).

<sup>9</sup>“Fort Worth Locals,” *Dallas Morning News*, 26 March 1889, 6.

<sup>10</sup>“Fort Worth Local Record,” *Dallas Morning News*, 18 August 1886, 3.

required any skill. Various aspects of the work included admitting people through doors, carrying baggage, assisting patrons in parlor or sleeping cars, or carrying out routine cleaning. In the same vein, the most common jobs available for African American women did not require in-depth knowledge. The practice of being a nurse at the turn of the century did not immediately imply working alongside doctors in sanitariums. Individuals hired nurses to be caretakers for their children or to help an ailing person feel more comfortable within their home. Though these jobs filled various needs throughout the city's white-owned businesses, the job requirements remained geared to unskilled labor.

Black entrepreneurs who obtained skills and learned a trade rose above the stereotype that African Americans were easily hired as unskilled labor. (Table 4) By

Table 4. Short Listing of African American Businesses and Entrepreneurs, 1890

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S. W. Woodard .....	boot and shoemaker; business @ 908 Elm
Mrs. Rachael Nash .....	restaurant owner; located on 12 <sup>th</sup> St. between Main, Rusk
T. H. Daily .....	proprietor of a laundry; business @ 1110 Jones
Dr. W. E. Davis .....	physician and surgeon; office located @ 1304 Main
E. Hines .....	proprietor of the Fort Worth City Laundry
H. Johnson and David Moore ....	Johnson & Moore, groceries & confectionaries; located on 6 <sup>th</sup> St. between Terry, Elm
S. D. Russell .....	pastor at A.M.E. Church and owner and editor of <i>Torchlight Appeal</i>
William M. York .....	barber; business @ 1103 Main

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*Source: D.S. Clark's City Directory, 101, 103, 147, 159, 198, 225, 273, 275.*

1888, several Fort Worth African Americans opened their own businesses in the black community. The black business district in the city was on 9<sup>th</sup> Street, between Calhoun and Jones. The area, only three blocks long, soon gained the nickname the "9<sup>th</sup> Street drag." The local city directories listed names and businesses owned by and catering to African Americans, such as doctors, saloons, hotels, grocers, and newspapers.

Incomplete records do not allow historians further knowledge about black business accomplishments or longevity, especially regarding black newspapers. The fact that black newspapers existed, however, indicates that African Americans in the young city felt connected to one another. The first African American newspaper was the *Torchlight-Appeal*, edited by S. D. Russell. The paper's first reference came in the 1890 Fort Worth city directory, but by 1894, both Russell and the *Torchlight-Appeal* had disappeared from the directory. Apparently early black newspapers, like the *Torchlight-Appeal*, existed for one year at most, and either another editor's paper replaced it or the paper simply ceased publication. In 1892-93, Jullian T. Bailey, a local black attorney, edited *Bailey's Free South*, and in 1894-95, Jay W. Taylor and James C. Scott issued the *Item*.<sup>11</sup>

Not all occupations open to African Americans were reputable, though. As a central hub for cattle drivers, the early years of Fort Worth saw saloons, brothels, dancehalls, and run down shacks in an area located between 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Street on Main Street dubbed Hell's Half Acre. Prostitution in Fort Worth remained open to both black and white and there is evidence that men of all races sought after African American prostitutes. In a newspaper article condemning the city's redlight district, a reporter wrote, "First impressions are difficult to overcome, and the man who rides up Main or Rusk Street on his first visit to Fort Worth and sees the negro courtesans flaunting their shamelessness and greasy mother hubbards in the public eye has received an impression hard to eradicate."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>*Morrison and Fourmy's General Directory of the City of Fort Worth, 1894-1895*, 69.

<sup>12</sup>"The State Press: What the Papers Throughout Texas are Talking About," *Dallas Morning News* 22 September 1889, 6. This part of the article is referring to an article in the (Fort Worth?) *Gazette*.

Fort Worth citizen's soon saw Hell's Half Acre as a blight on the city. On 31 March 1887, the city's law enforcement officers attempted to clean up the district after many citizens wrote complaints to the local newspapers about the area.<sup>13</sup> The police arrested prostitutes, drifters, and people deemed as lazy. In all, twenty-two African American prostitutes were arrested and placed in the county jail. Later the same day the police imprisoned white prostitutes, but they posted bail and did not have to stay in jail. By October 1889, the police had completely wiped out Hell's Half Acre, and the city began rebuilding the area to erase the unpleasant image of what had existed there for more than thirty years.<sup>14</sup>

At the beginning of the twentieth century, agriculture remained a large factor in Fort Worth's economic activity. In 1910, there were 3,582 farms in Tarrant County, with whites still owning the majority of land—96.5 percent compared to 3.5 percent owned by black and other non-white farmers. Within ten years, however, farming declined and manufacturing remained steady in the city. By 1920, farms had decreased to 3,336, and manufacturing concerns, although decreasing from 321 businesses in 1900 to 257 in 1920, produced a wide variety of products. With the rise in factory and business production, job opportunities for African Americans also increased, but they remained segregated. In 1913 positions as railway mail clerks were open to black men, but the Railway Mail Association's committee decided to make sure that white mail clerks had separate runs from black mail clerks. In an article in the *Dallas Morning News*, a section of the Railway Mail Association's meeting displayed how even government businesses

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<sup>13</sup>“Fort Worth Notes,” *Dallas Morning News*, 1 April 1887, 7.

<sup>14</sup>“City Schools Progressing; New Buildings Going Up,” *Dallas Morning News*, 26 December 1887, 5. For more information about Fort Worth's red light district see Richard F. Selcer, *Hell's Half Acre: The Life and Legend of a Red Light District* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1991).

preferred to stay segregated. “It has plainly been demonstrated that it is to the advantage of all concerned that the negro clerks be given separate assignments from those of the Caucasian race, and that as in other departments of the Government service such segregation of the two races has already been effected, this committee deems it advisable for the races to be separated, and we further request immediate steps be taken to that end.”<sup>15</sup>

A 1907 colored directory listed businesses owned by Fort Worth blacks, including twenty-three hotels and rooming houses, nine barbershops, seven tailors, and eight doctors. All of these businesses, located mainly in the black business district downtown, catered primarily to other African Americans, but some occupations held a little leeway in regards to working with and for white patrons. For example, Mary Keys Gipson moved to Fort Worth about 1872 and eventually became the first African American woman in the South to receive a nursing certificate from an accredited school. Gipson graduated from the Chatauqua School of Nursing in Jamestown, New York on 2 March 1907 and came back to Fort Worth to work with a variety of white doctors.<sup>16</sup>

Sam Kilgore was an ex-slave who learned from every experience throughout his life. When he was younger, John Peacock owned Kilgore in Williams County, Tennessee. During the Civil War, he joined the Confederate Army and served as the valet and companion of his master’s son, Frank Peacock. Frank Peacock died shortly after his promotion to colonel, and Kilgore came to Texas after the war with his former master. A year after Sam Kilgore came to Texas he joined the United States Army for “de Indian war.” After the campaigning against Native Americans in the West, Kilgore

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<sup>15</sup>“Want Negro Railway Clerks Segregated,” *Dallas Morning News*, 8 May 1913.

<sup>16</sup>“Ex-Slave Here First in South to Become Nurse,” in Williams, *In Old Fort Worth*, 15.



served in the Spanish-American War in 1898 and 1899. In all three wars he hardly saw combat because he always worked with the supplies, but his experiences proved to be to his benefit. Kilgore came to Fort Worth shortly after the Spanish-American War and learned cement work from John Bardon. In 1917, Kilgore started his own cement contracting business, which was still in operation at the time of the Slave Narrative project interviews in the 1930s.<sup>17</sup>

By the 1920s, Fort Worth was one of the major economic powerhouses in Texas. The economy had moved further away from agriculture and farming toward manufacturing, especially related to the stockyards. The city's factories manufactured various products for the nation and contained a major railroad center in the Southwest that allowed these products to ship to various national markets. The city had three central packinghouses in north Fort Worth, which included the Fort Worth Packing Company established by local businessmen in 1890 and the nationally known Armour and Swift plants.<sup>18</sup> (Fig. 5) The stockyards and railroads accounted for a large percentage of African American jobs, especially in the late 1800s. In the 1890 Fort Worth city directory, 3.72 percent of occupations listed for black residents included jobs such as railroader, wiper at the Texas and Pacific roundhouse, and laborer for various train line freight depots. Seven railway companies ran through the city and employed thousands of residents. These railroad companies included the Fort Worth and Denver City Railway;

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<sup>17</sup>USWPA, 258.

<sup>18</sup>Information about the Fort Worth Packing Company from J'Nell Pate, *North of the River: A Brief History of North Fort Worth* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1994), 18. The Armour and Swift packing plants closed in 1971. A few years after closing the plant, a fire swept through the buildings and destroyed them except for the administrative offices. An historical marker now stands where the plants used to be. For more information about the Fort Worth stockyards, see J'Nell Pate, *Livestock Legacy: The Fort Worth Stockyards, 1887-1987* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1988).

Fig. 5. The Fort Worth stockyards and Armour & Co. were located along N. Main and E. Exchange Ave. in northern Fort Worth. This map portrays the layout of the stockyard cattle pens and feed storage in 1911. Reprinted from Digital Sanborn Maps 1867-1970, Fort Worth, Texas 1910-1911, vol. 2, 1911, sheet 182.

the Fort Worth and Rio Grande Railway; the Gulf, Colorado, and Santa Fe Railway, the Houston and Texas Central Railway; the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railway; the St. Louis, Arkansas, and Texas Railway; and the Texas and Pacific Railway.<sup>19</sup>

By 1924 nine refineries that produced petroleum products valued at approximately \$52 million annually, four factories that made tools and oil well supplies for oil drilling in Texas, and the only helium gas plant in the United States. In addition to these plants, a total of 381 factories produced various goods and services such as furniture, flour, feed, cottonseed oil, clothing, pottery, chemicals, and brick, all of which employed 16,000 people and increased the city's economy. In 1924, the city boasted a municipal zoo, thirty-one parks, and two "super-skyscrapers" that were twenty-four stories and twenty stories high, respectively.<sup>20</sup>

In the city's occupational sphere, however, blacks continued to be relegated mostly to unskilled or semi-skilled labor. In 1921, the Amalgamated Butcher Workman Union went on a nationwide strike against the Swift and Armour meatpacking plants in an attempt to obtain higher wages. At the time, Fort Worth suffered from high unemployment, so unskilled black strikebreakers quickly filled the gaps left by the strikers. As in most U.S. cities, strikes created tension between strikers and strikebreakers, which could culminate in violence. White and African American strikebreakers risked their lives as they sought work, especially while white policemen did virtually nothing to protect them from the strikers' wrath until it was too late. The 1921 strike resulted in the lynching of Fred Rouse, an African American strikebreaker,

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<sup>19</sup>*D.S. Clark's City Directory of the Inhabitants, Manufacturing Establishments, Institutions, Business Firms, etc. in the City of Fort Worth, Texas* (Fort Worth, TX: TX Printing and Lithography Co., 1890), 57.

<sup>20</sup>Wortham, 235-38.

who was beaten, shot, and hanged shortly after he walked through the picket line and shot two men, Tom and Tracy Maclin, in an attempt to break away from an angry crowd of strikers.<sup>21</sup> The shots Rouse fired, however, proved to be nonfatal to the Maclin brothers, but resulted in death for Rouse. Previously, throughout the day, the packinghouse strikers had not created problems for the nonunion strikebreakers aside from vocally taunting them, but Tom and Tracy Maclin, along with a crowd of other raucous strikers accosted Rouse as he left the factory. While walking through the already frenzied crowd of picketers, someone yelled that Rouse would not work the following morning. Rouse became the target of the strikers' malice when he responded to the threat by proclaiming, "I'll bet you \$100 that I will be back in the morning at 7 o'clock." The Maclin brothers and the other strikers violently confronted Rouse simply because he wanted to work. This decision, unfortunately, resulted in Rouse's death.<sup>22</sup>

While white businesses and city mandates continued to hold Fort Worth blacks at bay, the city's black businesses acted as social gatherings for the African American community. Such businesses included the Greenleaf Cafe, located on 9<sup>th</sup> Street, between Calhoun and Jones, owned by Levi Cooper, and the Jim Hotel, an African American hotel with a famous jazz club that attracted musical legends such as Cab Calloway, T-Bone Walker, and Duke Ellington.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Barry T. Sandlin, "The 1921 Butcher Workmen Strike in Fort Worth, Texas" (M.A. thesis, University of Texas at Arlington, 1988). For more information about Texas labor unions and especially in Fort Worth, see "Labor Resources at The Center for American History," [www.cah.utexas.edu/guides/labor.htm](http://www.cah.utexas.edu/guides/labor.htm), Date Accessed: 18 April 2005.

<sup>22</sup>"Negro Shoots Strikers and is Severely Beaten by Mob in Fort Worth," *Dallas Morning News*, 7 December 1921.

<sup>23</sup>Standifer, 15.

Black Texans in Fort Worth not only created their own businesses, but also rose to leadership status in the African American community, bringing influence and encouragement when needed most. During the First World War, African Americans continued to try to take part in important ventures, not only to attempt to break the color barrier, but also to help their country. In 1917, the National Council of Defense reorganized the medical section for World War I to bring cooperation to and coordination of various health organizations such as the Red Cross and the Texas State Board of Health. The committee accepted applications for the medical reserve corps and reviewed more than 150 applicants in Texas, including an African American physician. In an article describing the effort, a journalist wrote, "A negro doctor today sent in his application and gave excellent recommendations. His was the first application from a negro physician. He will probably be recommended for a commission to serve with one of the negro regiments to be drafted, it is believed."<sup>24</sup>

Andy Nelson, a former slave, became the leader of a small African American settlement called Moser Valley, ten miles east of Fort Worth.<sup>25</sup> Even more of a leader within the black community was William "Gooseneck" McDonald. McDonald became a champion for Fort Worth African American solidarity and business prowess through his involvement with fraternal organizations and business success. Born 22 June 1866 at College Mound, Texas, McDonald, whose parents were former slaves, became the first major black business owner in Fort Worth. He came to Fort Worth as a young man seeking work and better wages. McDonald quickly became involved with a fledgling organization, the Seven Stars of Consolidation of America in 1882. Four years later

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<sup>24</sup>"Physicians to Meet at Fort Worth Today," *Dallas Morning News*, 3 July 1917.

<sup>25</sup>USWPA, 8 July 1937, 145-47.

McDonald joined three other local chapters of fraternal institutions: the Knights of Pythias, the Odd Fellows, and the Prince Hall Free and Accepted Masons. His oratorical skills quickly gained McDonald prominence within the various local chapters as well as within the city's African American society. A few of McDonald's early accomplishments included using fraternal money to provide members with insurance and death benefits, paying poll taxes for African American voters within the community, and starting a bank in 1911. Five Fort Worth fraternal organization chapters helped fund the African American bank: the Knights of Pythias, the Heroines of Jericho, the Ancient Order of Pilgrims, the Odd Fellows, and the Prince Hall Free and Accepted Masons. To raise the money, each member purchased shares of the new venture for \$11 each. The Fraternal Bank and Trust Company proved a success. The bank became a depository for the 22,334 blacks in Fort Worth and served African American customers throughout Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Nevada<sup>26</sup>

A successful businessman, McDonald became one of the richest African American men in the South during his life. His investments totaled between one third to half a million dollars in the early twentieth century. As a self-made man, McDonald often expounded upon the belief of self-help and black solidarity:

If you want a beautiful home, go build it. If you want concrete sidewalks, go have them put down . . . . Do you wish to have Negro clerks in grocery stores? Go and establish you a bank . . . . Do you wish to have Negroes manage great business concerns and great enterprises? Go and establish them. Treat these as we have the church and lodge – stand by them, support them and feel that you are honored when you support and maintain business enterprises managed and controlled by Negroes for the benefit of our race.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Cary, 106.

<sup>27</sup>William M. McDonald, Speech at Shreveport, Louisiana, 1 January 1919, quoted in Bruce A. Glasrud, "William M. McDonald: Business and Fraternal Leader," in *Black Leaders: Texans for Their Times*, ed. Alwyn Barr and Robert A. Calvert (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1981), 103.

McDonald was an inspiration for the city's African Americans to stand tall and accomplish anything they dreamed. He encouraged other black citizens to embrace their ability to excel in their individual entrepreneurial endeavors. While McDonald believed that the African American community must decide to achieve great things, he also knew that in a society in which African Americans were the minority, contact and cooperation with whites were essential.<sup>28</sup>

McDonald was not the only one who encouraged such accomplishments. At least two organizations existed in the city that helped African American entrepreneurs. Founded at the turn of the twentieth century, each organization provided unique functions within Fort Worth's black business world. The Fort Worth Colored Business Men's League No. 3 was organized in May 1905 as part of the National Negro Business League, a national organization in New York founded by Booker T. Washington.<sup>29</sup> This group provided a network of African American business professionals to help them to know each other better in the community.

Progressive reform in occupational spheres, however, was not included among the other forward steps the city took. In 1938, Fort Worth city officials once again rejected the motion to hire African American policemen to patrol black neighborhoods, although other Texas cities such as Houston had at least a few black men on their police payroll. African American leaders requested the addition of twelve black policemen to work in black residential and business districts in 1946. Police Chief R. E. Dysart responded to their suggestion with mere excuses. He claimed that the black residential

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<sup>28</sup>Glasrud, "William M. McDonald," 83-111.

<sup>29</sup>Alwyn Barr, *Black Texans: A History of African Americans in Texas, 1528-1995*, 2d ed. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 153.

areas were too scattered throughout Fort Worth to assign to current policemen, and there was not enough money in the budget to hire new people. He further added that he heard from cities that employed African American police that blacks were “only partially successful as officers, even among their own people.”<sup>30</sup>

Thus, blacks in Fort Worth continued to hold menial jobs. By 1940, the United States national census calculated that 10,082 non-white adults of working age lived in Fort Worth. Of those, 80 percent worked in domestic service, general service, or unskilled labor compared to 3 percent working as professionals. Part of the 3 percent were included in integrated sports, such as baseball. In 1955, two African Americans—Edward Moore and Maurice (Maury) Wills—joined the Fort Worth team in the Texas League.<sup>31</sup>

These percentages persisted for the next three decades. In 1964, the desegregation of the Fort Worth public school system sparked trends for integration in other areas of the community such as employment. Although change occurred slowly, the occupational doors opened for African Americans as the Human Relations Committee pushed the City of Fort Worth to relax its hiring policies and to create more employment opportunities. In this same regard, the Human Relations Committee also encouraged African American youths to take technical and business classes to prepare for the anticipated “boom” in black employment.<sup>32</sup> Such equal employment finally occurred in 1968 when the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* hired Cecil Johnson, the first African

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<sup>30</sup>“City Council Rejects Plan to Employ Negro Policemen,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 4 December 1946.

<sup>31</sup>“Fort Worth Will End Color Line,” *Dallas Morning News*, 19 April 1955, 24.

<sup>32</sup>“Opportunities Seen for Negroes Here,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 5 July 1964.



American employee at a white-owned Texas newspaper. In the following two years the paper hired two more black men.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, only three men among close to 29,000 black working-age adults by 1970 left nothing much accomplished.

By 1970, predominate job categories held by African Americans were service work followed by non-transportation operators and privately employed domestics (Table 5). African American family incomes related directly to the restrained employment

Table 5. Fort Worth Black Employment Distribution out of 28,880 Black Employees, 1970

Occupation	No.	Percentage
Service Workers.....	7,559	26.2
Operatives except Transport....	5,904	20.4
Private Household Workers.....	2,898	10.0
Laborers except Farm.....	2,849	9.9
Craftsmen and Foremen.....	2,540	8.8
Clerical.....	2,375	8.2
Professional and Technical.....	1,831	6.3
Transport Equipment Operative	1,768	6.1
Sales.....	582	2.0
Managers and Administrators...	453	1.6
All Farm Work.....	121	0.5

*Source:* Brown, *Cowtown 1977*, 444-55.

opportunities at the end of 1969. Economically, Fort Worth blacks constantly remained on the bottom tier when compared to whites and Hispanics. The mean income for Fort Worth blacks in 1969 was \$7,135 compared to a national average of \$10,999. Fort Worth African Americans, however, earned approximately \$1000 more than the average income

<sup>33</sup>Tim Madigan, "Our Own Sins," [www.dfw.com/mld/startelegram/news/special\\_packages/spcl/4252415.htm](http://www.dfw.com/mld/startelegram/news/special_packages/spcl/4252415.htm), Date Accessed: 22 January 2005.

for black Texans in the same year. In the same comparison, Fort Worth Latinos earned an average of \$8,661 in 1969 (Table 6).<sup>34</sup>

Table 6. Income for African Americans and Latinos in Fort Worth, Texas, and the United States, 1969

	<u>Total</u>		<u>African Americans</u>		<u>Latinos</u>	
	Mean	Per Capita	Mean	Per Capita	Mean	Per Capita
Ft Worth	10,971	3,269	7,135	1,861	8,661	1,993
Texas	9,955	2,810	6,118	1,561	6,939	1,521
U.S.	10,999	3,139	7,114	1,818	8,578	2,065

*Source:* Brown, *Cowtown 1977*, 528-3.

African Americans in Fort Worth during the early twentieth century definitely made a place for themselves within the city's expanding business districts and broadening economy. They made a transition from agriculture to hourly wages in factories, restaurants, and local businesses as the railroad took a firm hold on the city's industry. It was not long before Fort Worth blacks began to seek jobs only open to white workers, such as mail carriers, policemen, or journalists in the main city newspaper. Within this new realm of work, however, African Americans faced a bleak outlook. They were consistently turned down due to racial prejudices as seen when the city needed more policemen but rejected African Americans. If they were not declined, Fort Worth blacks faced the other constant fear of racial violence in relation to work, such as the incident resulting in the lynching of Fred Rouse in 1921.

Not all blacks in Fort Worth suffered such discrimination, however. As seen in this chapter, there were substantial numbers of entrepreneurial African Americans who opened their own businesses within black neighborhoods or along the "9<sup>th</sup> Street drag."

<sup>34</sup>Earl Brown, *Cowtown 1977: A Social Analysis of Fort Worth, Texas* (Fort Worth: Department of Sociology, Texas Wesleyan College, 1978), 528-34.

African American business leaders rose to encourage their brethren and provide quality services for the community. Through the years since Emancipation, African Americans in Fort Worth fought for the right to live and work in the city. Their success, however, could still be considered a minimal triumph. As seen in Table 6, African Americans earned less than Latinos, another minority group, in 1969. This economic bias did not deter Fort Worth African Americans from persevering and continuing to better themselves and their situation with the southern city.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Politics: From Exploitation to a True Voice

Along with practicing physical violence toward African Americans and resentment of encroaching segregated housing boundaries, white Fort Worth citizens after the Civil War attempted to bar blacks from embracing freedom by keeping their political power limited. Whites tried to hold dominion over freed blacks by keeping them from voting and from gaining free access to public facilities at the beginning of Reconstruction. These efforts failed when the federal government intervened and set up protective legislation for African Americans. During this time, blacks could vote and participate in the Texas Republican Party. In the early years of Fort Worth, however, white politicians coerced black voters in order to swing the majority of votes their way. In the 1878 mayoral election in Fort Worth, for example, white candidate Captain Day made slight improvements to black neighborhoods, such as putting in sidewalks, and had black political organizers like A. Carter, the “Boss Negro gambler,” give potential voters liquor and cigars.<sup>1</sup> While white politicians earned votes from such antics, African Americans knew they needed political allies. In January 1897, the Afro-American Citizens’ Conference, an African American middle-class reform society, already had their sights on integrating Fort Worth politics by “running a colored man or a colored

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<sup>1</sup>Reby Cary, *Princes Shall Come Out of Egypt, Texas, and Fort Worth* (Pittsburgh, PA: Dorrance Publishing Co., Inc., 2002), 157.

man's representative for City Council from the Third Ward."<sup>2</sup> The progressive organization, however, was not successful in placing an African American representative within city government.

As a child, Lou Skelton remembered when African Americans were able to vote. White men would drive to black settlements to pick up eligible black men who could vote, but it did not matter to the white men whether or not the African Americans knew for what or whom they were voting. Skelton remembered that she laughed about how the black men in her community were treated well one day every year, as if they held power in their vote. Skelton, however, pinpointed the real reason white men cared enough to bring black voters in droves to the election booths: "They didn't even have any mother-wit, nor any education, but they were asked to do their duty like they were first rate citizens on Election Day."<sup>3</sup> White politicians offered African American men a sense of pride and unity during an era when social boundaries kept them at bay.

Ironically, in many cases, black voters believed they did have a political obligation, at least in the beginning, to vote for the Republican Party, otherwise known as Lincoln's ticket. The Republican Party used the African American allegiance to Lincoln for their political benefit. A newspaper article from the *Milam County Vindicator* in 1889 claimed that the Republican Party liberated African Americans solely for political and voting purposes: "No doubt it would have been better for all parties had the negro

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<sup>2</sup>Richard F. Selcer, *Hell's Half Acre: The Life and Legend of a Red Light District* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1991), 221-22.

<sup>3</sup>"Colonel Terry and the Slave Girl," *In Old Fort Worth: The Story of a City and its People as Published in the News-Tribune in 1976 and 1977* (Fort Worth, TX: Mack H. Williams and Madeline C. Williams, 1977), 12.

been colonized instead of emancipated; but for power at the ballot-box the republicans emancipated the negro.”<sup>4</sup>

After years of subordination in the political arena, African Americans did not stay ignorant of how white political organizers viewed, neglected, and used them for the party’s political gain. A Republican convention held in September 1902 in Fort Worth outraged W. H. Noble, a black editor of the *Galveston City Times*. Blacks who attended the convention received little more attention than simply receiving financial help to get to and from the convention and other financial expenses at the meeting. The Republican convention’s white majority ignored their opinions and voices, which riled Noble to call for more political interest within the Texas African American community:

The negro is being minimized by the white Republicans and he is gradually being showed to the rear. . . . He is in about the most dangerous position today he has occupied since his freedom. He is fast losing influence and importance in Republican conventions and when he loses it there he might as well surrender his right to vote. The white Republicans intend to eliminate him. As long as he is not independent and as long as he goes, remains and returns from convention at the cost of some white Republican, the work of elimination will be easy.<sup>5</sup>

The following month, on 16 October 1902, during the Fort Worth Democratic executive committee meeting, the members set the rules of the primary election slated for 17 December 1902. The majority ruling was that African Americans would be left out of the city primaries and only white voters could participate. Only two men from the committee disagreed with the decision—Dr. Chambers and Mr. Fisher. Chambers argued that it was bad to set a precedent, which might result in the African American vote going to other parties and therefore creating a defeat for the Democrats in retaliation for the blatant

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<sup>4</sup>“The State Press: What the Papers Throughout Texas are Talking About,” *Dallas Morning News*, 16 September 1889, 4.

<sup>5</sup>“Elimination of the Negro,” *Dallas Morning News*, 12 September 1902, 2.

oversight. Fisher proposed an amendment that would allow blacks who paid the poll tax to be eligible to vote. After the dismissal of both arguments, the Democratic primary in Fort Worth barred African Americans once more.<sup>6</sup>

African Americans continued to fight for their rightful place at the ballot box, but both the Republican and Democratic primaries persisted in keeping blacks at bay until the actual election day. If there was even a hint that a white politician favored black voting in primaries in Fort Worth with any major party at the turn of the century, the rumor was quickly extinguished. No candidate wanted to be connected to such rumors, as it would surely ruin his political career. In 1908, a member of the Democratic State Executive Committee in Fort Worth vehemently denied that he ever said he was for African Americans being involved in the Democratic primary. In his rebuttal, the politician stated that it “is obvious in this editorial to besmirch me by pretending that I advocated the participation of negroes in the primary, when the Record [sic] distinctly knows that I did not.”<sup>7</sup> Two years after the United States Supreme Court handed down the *Smith v. Allwright* decision in 1944, allowing blacks to vote in previously all-white Democratic primaries, Fort Worth blacks were finally able to vote in Fort Worth.

Blacks in Fort Worth tried to extend their voting rights locally in the early twentieth century and continually struggled to be allowed to vote, but their efforts lacked unity. During the early twentieth century, Fort Worth blacks supported a reform ticket that proposed to institute a city-manager type government and remove the revived Hell’s

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<sup>6</sup>“Exclusion of Negroes,” *Dallas Morning News*, 17 October 1902, 7.

<sup>7</sup>“Reply to Fort Worth Record,” *Dallas Morning News*, 31 March 1908, 10.

Half Acre from the black part of town.<sup>8</sup> Discouraged and tired of their vote being used only on election days and for white political agendas, a group of African Americans in Fort Worth met in late 1922. They wanted specifically to gain more political control by taking part in the Republican primaries. At the meeting R. D. Evans, a black attorney from Waco, stated, “We don’t propose to stay in the kitchen, then have the Republicans vote us on election day.” Evans wanted to prove to the two main political party conventions that African Americans could be trusted with crucial voting decisions. “We propose to show that we are an asset and not a menace to the State . . . and we intend to stand for law and order, from the bill of rights to the prohibition amendment.”<sup>9</sup> As a direct result of the meeting, Fort Worth blacks formed a local branch of the Independent Colored Voters’ League on 15 August 1922.<sup>10</sup> This political group vied for voting rights until the late 1930s. In order to work together further to gain black suffrage, African Americans formed the Negro Voting League in 1937. By 1939, African American voting strength in Fort Worth reached a total of three thousand in spite of poll taxes and exemptions.<sup>11</sup> This seemingly small number of black voters allowed their voices, although weak, to be heard in local affairs.

Many Fort Worth blacks took advantage of their voting privileges and never took them for granted. Sam Kilgore, an ex-slave who led an extraordinary life before settling down in Fort Worth, always voted when he could. In an interview from the 1930 Slave

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<sup>8</sup>Alwyn Barr, *Black Texans: A History of African Americans in Texas, 1528-1995*, 2d ed. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 133.

<sup>9</sup>“Negroes Call Political Meeting at Fort Worth,” *Dallas Morning News*, 5 August 1922, 8.

<sup>10</sup>“Fort Worth Negroes have Branch of Voters’ League,” *Dallas Morning News*, 18 August 1922, 4.

<sup>11</sup>“Negroes Lost Ballot Fight,” *Fort Worth*, 21 July 1932; and “Negro Vote to be Factor in City Poll,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 28 March 1939.



Narrative project, Kilgore said that he “voted ev’ry ‘lection and ‘lieves it de duty for ev’ry citizen to vote.”<sup>12</sup> Similar to Kilgore, William M. Thomas came to the city around 1910 and believed that African Americans should vote, but only if they knew what they were voting for so other people would not take advantage of them or their vote. As seen at the turn of the twentieth century, white politicians took advantage of African American voters and Thomas wanted to combat that exploitation.<sup>13</sup>

Black women, on the other hand, held a very distinct position within the voting realm. As women, they were not allowed to vote until 1920, when the United States ratified the Nineteenth Amendment, but as blacks, they felt even more intimidated about voting. Philles Thomas, an ex-slave, did not vote and did not believe women should vote.<sup>14</sup> Louise Mathews, on the other hand, tried voting once in her life, but did not care to vote after that. Mathews’ husband, Bill, though, always voted “de Lincoln ticket”—meaning that he continued the tradition of African Americans by voting for the Republican Party until the mid-1930s when blacks turned toward the Democratic Party.<sup>15</sup>

Not all Fort Worth African American women felt the same about voting as did Thomas and Mathews. In 1918, six Fort Worth African American women wanted to vote, but when they asked to register, the County Democratic Committee denied their

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<sup>12</sup>USWPA, n.d., 259, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mesn&fileName=162/mesn162.db&recNum=259&itemLink=S?ammem/mesnbib:@field\(AUTHOR+@od1\(Kilgore,+Sam\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mesn&fileName=162/mesn162.db&recNum=259&itemLink=S?ammem/mesnbib:@field(AUTHOR+@od1(Kilgore,+Sam))); accessed: 18 February 2006.

<sup>13</sup>USWPA, 2 October 1937, 95-99, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mesn&fileName=164/mesn164.db&recNum=100&itemLink=S?ammem/mesnbib:@field\(AUTHOR+@od1\(Thomas,+William+M+\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mesn&fileName=164/mesn164.db&recNum=100&itemLink=S?ammem/mesnbib:@field(AUTHOR+@od1(Thomas,+William+M+))); accessed: 18 February 2006.

<sup>14</sup>USWPA, June 1937, 92-94, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mesn&fileName=164/mesn164.db&recNum=97&itemLink=S?ammem/mesnbib:@field\(AUTHOR+@od1\(Thomas,+Philles\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mesn&fileName=164/mesn164.db&recNum=97&itemLink=S?ammem/mesnbib:@field(AUTHOR+@od1(Thomas,+Philles))); accessed: 18 February 2006.

<sup>15</sup>USWPA, n.d., 65-66, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mesn&fileName=163/mesn163.db&recNum=69&itemLink=S?ammem/mesnbib:@field\(AUTHOR+@od1\(Mathews,+Louise\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mesn&fileName=163/mesn163.db&recNum=69&itemLink=S?ammem/mesnbib:@field(AUTHOR+@od1(Mathews,+Louise))); accessed: 17 February 2006.

request. The *Dallas Morning News* published an article about the incident. The reporter wrote that the women “insisted they be allowed to register.” Further details regarding the event point to specific significant characteristics about the women. The women were well dressed, appeared intelligent, and a few arrived at the courthouse in automobiles. These descriptions indicate that voting was important to the six women, who were more than likely among the city’s most affluent African Americans.<sup>16</sup> This provides further evidence that Fort Worth’s black citizens wanted inclusion in the decision-making process for their city, state, and nation.

African American suffrage was important and could have helped blacks make strides in their place within the state and nation, but without a voice in the city government, blacks’ opinions still went unheard. But in 1956 their goals were given a chance to spread to the Fort Worth community. By the end of that year, city officials created a biracial committee made up of five white men and five African American men, all of whom were prominent leaders. This committee formed to review and determine solutions to race relations within the city.<sup>17</sup> The creation of the committee came in conjunction with the evolving changes seen throughout the nation. The previous two years saw the groundbreaking *Brown vs. Board of Education* case and the Montgomery bus boycott in Alabama. As the civil rights movement swept through the nation in the 1950s and into the 1960s, African Americans continued to see political progress.

With the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, politics changed as more African Americans registered to vote. These changes were seen in all political realms,

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<sup>16</sup>Ruthe Winegarten, *Black Texas Women: 150 Years of Trial and Triumph* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 210.

<sup>17</sup>“Mayor to Announce 10 on Biracial Committee,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 11 September 1956; and “Racial Committee is Named by Mayor,” *Fort Worth Press*, 12 September 1956.

from national to local. When the President Lyndon B. Johnson first signed the bill into law August 1965, political theorists debated whether the law would have any effect in Texas. The law banished the use of literacy tests and charging a poll tax for prospective voters. By 1965, a majority of Texas counties no longer required a literacy test, thereby allowing the state to forego any federal involvement to aid African Americans' admittance on poll lists. The main aspect of the bill for Texas remained in the abolishment of poll taxes. In a survey of African American and white voters conducted in 1965, many Texans said they were more likely to register to vote with the elimination of the tax, which averaged \$1.75 in Texas counties. White politicians were not concerned that African Americans would elect a member of their race into political office, since blacks did not hold a majority vote in any Texas county aside from Waller County near Houston. Political scientists, such as Dr. James R. Soukup, who coauthored "Party and Factional Division in Texas," claimed that without an increase in African American political organization, the number of black voters within any Texas county would not increase.<sup>18</sup>

Two years later, however, a group of local businessmen and African American voters in Fort Worth brought about a political change that shook the Texas city. In April 1967, the people of Fort Worth elected the first African American to the city council with a little help from local businessmen. A local group of Fort Worth businessmen formed in the late 1960s and 1970s to promote racial unity within the city. Though the assembly never became an official organization, they called themselves the Good Government League, composed of prominent white and black businessmen. Dr. Edward W. Guinn's

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<sup>18</sup>"Texas to Escape Voting Shakeup: White, Negro Leaders See Little Change from New Law," *Dallas Morning News*, 22 August 1965.

nomination and election to the Fort Worth City Council can be credited to the Good Government League's aid.<sup>19</sup> Guinn, an African American physician, proved to be a great selection as he overcame initial prejudices and proved himself as an asset to the council. In a newspaper article, two anonymous councilmen mentioned their hesitations with the initial electoral decision. Their main concern lay in the idea that Guinn might become an "agitator or concentrate on getting everything he could for Negroes without regard for the rest of the city." Guinn did not see himself representing just the African American community. In the same article, Guinn states that he "was elected by all the people of Fort Worth—not just its Negroes—and I have an obligation to do what is best for all the people. What is good for one is good for the other. If the city prospers and grows, there are more job opportunities for everyone."<sup>20</sup>

A champion for the city's residents, Guinn sought out the best for everyone, but never created a stir within the city's government. Guinn's successor, Leonard Briscoe, wanted to bring racial unity to the city and to combat growing racial violence. In 1971, Briscoe wanted to create better relations between the Fort Worth police force and minorities in the city by opening lines of communication to gain trust and support between the various groups. Briscoe suggested the creation of a biracial committee to hear complaints and review cases of mistreatment and violence against minorities from the Fort Worth police. Briscoe did not discuss his idea with Police Chief T. S. Walls, but Walls stated that he agreed with anything that would help the city. The rest of the police

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<sup>19</sup>Richard F. Selcer, *Fort Worth: A Texas Original!* (Austin, TX: Texas State Historical Association, 2004), 43.

<sup>20</sup>Carl Freund, "Dr. Guinn Works for All Citizens," *Dallas Morning News*, 14 October 1967. Guinn spoke figuratively about being elected by all of Fort Worth in the article. In Fort Worth's nonpartisan City Council elections, residents vote for a representative in their district, not the entire council.

force, however, were hesitant and skeptical about the committee. They thought the board might be biased and would ultimately accuse various police officers of misconduct and create strife within the community.<sup>21</sup> The proposed committee was not approved and proved to be one of many ways in which Briscoe sought to improve race relations and support minorities in the city. Briscoe's most successful plan helped African Americans and Latinos to gain employment in the city's police and fire departments and to further integrate jobs within the city government.<sup>22</sup>

Another notable African American political leader who created a stir within the city's government came in 1977 with Reby Cary, the only African American on the Fort Worth Board of Education at the time. At the beginning of 1977, the school board voted for a \$70 million bond to improve Fort Worth schools. Cary was the only member who voted against the issue and claimed he would create opposition to the bill. Cary claimed that the board's denial of \$3 million to finance a new school in Stop Six, a predominantly African American neighborhood, promoted segregated schools. The board already planned to improve all-black schools, but did not include intentions to build a new one. Cary believed that if the city built a new building rather than make improvements to an established structure, white students would attend the school and the area would become integrated. This stance angered other school board members because they saw Cary's actions as unprofessional and promoted racial tensions.<sup>23</sup> Fort Worth city officials were not ready for the opinions African American elected officials brought to the table during

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<sup>21</sup>Carl Freund, "Councilman Eyes Upgrading of Minority Image of Police," *Dallas Morning News*, 7 November 1971.

<sup>22</sup>Carl Freund, "Black Councilman's Critics Divided," *Dallas Morning News*, 21 September 1972.

<sup>23</sup>"Politics Charge Leveled: Cary Angers Fellow Members on School Board," *Dallas Morning News*, 6 February 1977.

the 1970s, but it was time for a change and the city's black community was ready. All the African American community needed was the chance to voice its desires, and during the 1960s and 1970s, the Republican and Democrat Parties opened the door.

As the civil rights movement spread across the United States, the two main political parties began to revive tactics first seen in the city during the nineteenth century. Politicians wanted to gain the support and votes of African American residents in local elections, so they began to adopt African American concerns as their own. In a mayoral election campaign in 1969 between incumbent Mayor DeWitt McKinley and future Mayor R. M. Stovall, Stovall sought to gain African American votes by reporting a meeting between his opponent and George Wallace. Whether or not that was the main reason for Stovall's victory over McKinley, it proves that the Democratic mayoral delegate used African Americans' negative feelings about Wallace to gain their votes in the election.<sup>24</sup>

During the 1960s, the Democratic Party included a new, bold tactic to ensure they would receive African American votes. The party included at least one African American delegate on the ballot to draw votes against the Republican Party. In November 1969, a newspaper article focused on the delegates nominated for open seats in the Tarrant County legislature. While the article's author wrote that conservatives dominated the delegation, he added that the "liberals are expected to field a slate which will include at least one Negro."<sup>25</sup> Such a statement generally guaranteed that the African American vote could be swayed toward an entire party if there was a member of their race on the ballot. The Republican Party followed suit in 1972 when it nominated

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<sup>24</sup>Carl Freund, "Wallace Issue Seen for Fort Worth Race," *Dallas Morning News*, 1 March 1969.

<sup>25</sup>"Hopefuls Line Up Support," *Dallas Morning News*, 6 November 1969.

four African American legislative candidates. The party claimed it wanted to change its image from the “country club set” to a more open and broader base. A change in image may have been one of the party’s agendas by adding black delegates to the party’s ticket, but more than that, the party wanted to gain more votes over the Democratic Party in the election. While the two parties employed these tactics to gain votes for their own political agendas, Fort Worth African Americans took advantage of the open invitation to elect delegates who challenged the current government and demand change.<sup>26</sup>

The black community in Fort Worth experienced a host of obstacles and tribulations from the beginning of black male suffrage to the creation of the biracial committee in 1956. Politics in the 1960s and 1970s during the national civil rights movement saw a change. To accommodate the changing attitude of racial unity and integration, Fort Worth politics broke the color line along with other institutions in the city such as schools, businesses, and public venues. The introduction of African American officers in city government came primarily through attempts to quell racial tension by including black delegates to the ballots. Both the Democratic and Republican Parties wanted to gain the growing African American vote, but Fort Worth blacks used this strategy to their advantage. Rather than allow the dominant political parties to exploit their vote, African Americans voiced their opinions and broke through the political color barrier. Their struggle was an amazing journey that required the determination of black men and women to stand up for themselves, their opinions, and their right to vote.

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<sup>26</sup>Carl Freund, “GOP Enlists Black Vote: 4 Negro Legislative Nominees Chosen to Change Image,” *Dallas Morning News*, 12 October 1972.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Social and Cultural Institutions: The Building Blocks of the African American Community

#### *Churches: The Foundation*

As one of the first African American institutions created by free black communities during the early years of American history, churches stood at the forefront of African American culture. Even before emancipation, slaves attended church with their masters, held services in their homes on large plantations, or met in common areas. After emancipation, through these religiously based organizations blacks gathered together to socialize, encourage each other, and build other institutions that benefited the community. As authors C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya state, “the Black Church has no challenger as the cultural womb of the black community. Not only did it give birth to new institutions such as schools, banks, insurance companies, and low income housing, it also provided an academy and an arena for political activities, and it nurtured young talent for musical, dramatic, and artistic development.”<sup>1</sup> Such institutions included the two other main sources of education and comradeship: schools and fraternal organizations. In 1865, Congress authorized the Freedmen’s Bureau to provide schools for children of freedmen. The Bureau worked with African American churches to build structures that served as schools during the week and places to worship on Sundays.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 8.

<sup>2</sup>W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: The Library of America, 1986), 29.



During the 1880s, the African Methodist Church in Fort Worth offered a private school to educate local African American children in exchange for ten cents a day for tuition.<sup>3</sup>

Churches had a large influence on black businesses as well. African American contractors built many black churches surrounding the Ninth Street business district and nearby black residential neighborhoods, while the Fraternal Bank and Trust Company financed the projects. An example of such a church was Mount Gilead Baptist Church. In an interview with Lenora Rolla, a prominent African American in Fort Worth, Rolla said that the church “stands as a monument to what the black community was like. It formed the backbone of the community because that was the only place we could speak free.”<sup>4</sup> In fact, Mount Gilead Baptist Church stands as the third oldest African American church in Fort Worth.<sup>5</sup>

Organized in 1875 and first built on the corner of 15<sup>th</sup> and Crump Street, the church was known by the congregation as simply the Old Baptist Church. Soon after, the minister changed the name to Mount Gilead Baptist Church. In 1883, the church relocated to 13<sup>th</sup> and Jones Streets, and the congregation split into two different factions.<sup>6</sup> Those who stayed at the first location renamed themselves Mount Pisgah Baptist Church. The Reverend T. W. Wilburn served as Mount Pisgah’s pastor until 1887, when an evangelical revivalist speaker came to Fort Worth to preach at Mount Gilead. J. L.

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<sup>3</sup>Oliver Knight, *Fort Worth: Outpost on the Trinity* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953), 162.

<sup>4</sup>Ben H. Standifer, Jr., “The Black Business District: 1900-1940,” (class paper, Texas Christian University, 1998). Standifer interview with Lenora Rolla, September 1998.

<sup>5</sup>The first African American church in Fort Worth was the Morning Chapel congregation of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, organized in 1868. Richard F. Selcer, *Fort Worth: A Texas Original!* (Austin, TX: Texas State Historical Association, 2004), 41. The second oldest congregation is Allen Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church established in 1870.

<sup>6</sup>The Mount Gilead Baptist Church congregation moved for the third and last time in 1912 to its present location at 600 Grove Street.

Griffin's ability to draw large crowds and recruit church members led the Mount Pisgah members to ask him to be their pastor. Griffin accepted the invitation but only remained for one year, when the Reverend P. W. Upshaw took over until 1891. During his four-year term, Upshaw expanded the building by enlarging the church sanctuary and created a seventy-two foot bell tower, complete with bell. During the next minister's seventeen-year term, the church saw an increase in membership and strong leaders. Sister Mattie McConnell and a group of other women members banded together to help the church raise money to build a parsonage for the new minister, create a choir stand, carpet the pulpit, and purchase a tread organ. McConnell also served as the church's music minister for church services and Sunday school activities. This trend of strong leaders continued when the Reverend S. R. Prince, Mount Pisgah's longest acting pastor, arrived. Prince was the superintendent of missions for the Southern Baptist Convention, Unincorporated. As such, Prince encouraged his congregation to serve each other and their community. The church's staff itself included a trained group of ministers, teachers, missionaries, deacons, deaconesses, trustees, treasurers, and helpers. In the 1930s, Prince oversaw the construction of a three-story, forty-room Educational Building that housed the enormous church staff. After Prince's death in 1953, the Reverend H. R. Bradley helped the congregation survive a massive blow. In 1957, Interstate Highway 35 ran directly through the property, forcing the congregation to move. The church purchased a previously white-owned church, the Old Evans Avenue Baptist Church, and even before moving to the new location, factions formed once more. Over two hundred members decided to split from the Mount Pisgah Baptist Church congregation and formed the Prince Memorial Baptist Church in honor of their previous long-time pastor. Regardless

of the split, the remaining older African American church remained strong and unified. In 1963, the Reverend Nehemiah Davis became pastor of the church. As a firm believer in Christian education, Davis created training programs for church leaders, officers, and Sunday school teachers. He challenged his adult congregation members to take more active roles in the church, brought a youth fellowship together, and gave both children's and youth choirs roles during worship services. Davis continues leading the congregation at Mount Pisgah Baptist Church and seeks to enrich and develop his members' lives through his dynamic sermons.<sup>7</sup>

As seen through the various ministers who served at Mount Pisgah Baptist Church, ministers of African American churches became the first leaders of black communities, building religious foundations, delivering morally uplifting sermons, and bringing encouragement to their congregations. During the 1960s especially, at the height of civil rights activities, black ministers spoke of African Americans as upright citizens and gave confidence to church members to stand tall as African Americans and to be proud of who they were as God's children and creation. In a study of black churches in the 1960s, Hart M. Nelsen and Anne Kusener Nelsen challenged the commonly held belief that African American churches remained docile during the civil rights era. In contrast to commonly known militants during the 1960s, such as the Black Panthers (originally called the Black Panther Party for Self Defense) and leaders like Malcolm X, church members remained devout and spoke of gaining equality through peaceful action. Church focus tended to remain on the heavenly treasures gained through Christian efforts on earth. Their center of attention, therefore, did not include temporal

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<sup>7</sup>Clyde McQueen, *Black Churches in Texas: A Guide to Historic Congregations* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), 185-86.

affairs of the present, and therefore congregations appeared closed off from current events. This commonly held belief, however, is wrong. While a minister's sermons focused on other worldly values and concepts, such as heaven, they did discuss contemporary issues and were involved in community activities. From Gallup Poll research conducted during the mid to late 1960s, the Nelsens concluded that "blacks were more likely than whites to embrace a more vigorous role for the church as an agency claiming their allegiance and as an institution making pronouncements and taking a protest stance."<sup>8</sup> The author of this thesis did not find such protest activity among Fort Worth churches, but Fort Worth African American churches remained a strong foundation for the city's black communities.

In a recent study of historic African American churches in Texas, Clyde McQueen found six different church buildings in Tarrant County and their congregations still thriving in the city. McQueen distinguished these churches as historic based upon their establishment during the nineteenth century. Mount Gilead Baptist Church and Mount Pisgah Baptist Church, discussed earlier, are included in the study. Other churches include the second oldest and largest Fort Worth African Methodist Episcopal Church, Allen Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Founded in 1870 by Reverend Moody, a pioneer pastor circuit rider, and five other area settlers, the congregation met in each other's homes until they purchased land in 1878 where they built the current structure.<sup>9</sup> A year later, in 1879, the church adopted the name Allen to

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<sup>8</sup>Hart M. Nelsen and Anne Kusener Nelsen, *Black Churches in the Sixties* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1975), 99.

<sup>9</sup>McQueen, *Black Churches*, 184.

honor Richard Allen, a slave who became first bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal denomination.

The Saint Andrews United Methodist Church formed in 1888, and on 25 December 1894 the Reverend Frank Tribune and five other people organized the Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church. The Saint John Missionary Baptist Church in Mosier Valley, an African American community outside of Fort Worth, organized in 1874. That year a small group of former slaves congregated at the home of Frank Young and called the new church Oak Grove Baptist Church. In the late nineteenth century, under the pastorate of the Reverend Jim Carroll, the church changed its name to Saint John.<sup>10</sup>

In an analysis of historic African American churches still standing in Dallas County and those in Tarrant County, McQueen showed that Tarrant County contains more of a religious base than does Dallas County. (Table 7) This conclusion is solely based upon the numbers found by McQueen as proof that twice the number of churches built in the nineteenth century still stand and the congregations are still extant in Fort Worth and Tarrant County than in Dallas County.

Table 7. Historic African American Churches by Denomination  
in Dallas and Tarrant County

	Baptist		Methodist				<u>Total</u>
	<u>Baptist</u>	<u>Missionary</u>	<u>AME</u>	<u>CME</u>	<u>ME</u>	<u>UM</u>	
Dallas	1	1	--	--	--	1	3
Fort Worth	2	2	1	--	--	1	6

*Source:* Clyde McQueen, *Black Churches in Texas: A Guide to Historic Congregations* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), 172.

<sup>10</sup>McQueen, *Black Churches*, 188.

*Education: Rising Above the Status Quo*

Fort Worth blacks could not escape the disfranchisement that weighed upon all black Texans at the beginning of the twentieth century; however, they did not stop fighting for their right to vote or for another intrinsic right—education. A general opinion held by white Texans regarding the growing violence between blacks and whites was discussed in an editorial in a Texas newspaper, the *Temple*. The author argued that educating African Americans did not cultivate them. “The solution does not rest in education of the negroes. Their education is necessarily of a superficial kind and tends to augment their insolence rather than to render them submissive to a position that they are fitted for by their past lives.”<sup>11</sup>

Many white citizens would not concede that African Americans wanted to learn how to read, write, and gain knowledge about their world. Blacks in Fort Worth, however, fought for their right to attend school and take whatever little freedoms whites would give them in order to better themselves and their families. They survived despite a general view held by whites that they did not appreciate school. This mindset carried into the twentieth century up to the 1960s when school systems grudgingly integrated.

As a child in early Fort Worth, Lou Skelton attended school sporadically and relied mostly on her mother to show her the world and to educate her. This practice was common for black children because after Reconstruction the city did not have any public schools available for either black or white children, and African American families could not afford private tutors. The first public school in Fort Worth opened in 1882 for white children only after insufficient funds and the town’s population quashed two previous

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<sup>11</sup>“The State Press: What the Papers Throughout Texas are Talking About,” *Dallas Morning News*, 22 September 1889, 6.

attempts. Although not mentioned by name in any records, directories from the 1880s point to the existence of private schools available to colored children. These private schools, as indicated by the adjective, were not funded by the city. The black community had to create its own schools and use local churches as classrooms.<sup>12</sup>

On 1 August 1881, Professor E. T. Albert called a mass meeting of Fort Worth's black citizens to discuss and begin to raise funds to build an African American schoolhouse. Albert already had offered the idea to the city's white bankers who supported the plan and gave funds to start building the structure. In order to appease the white citizens and to help raise the money, Albert, who was African American, suggested building the schoolhouse where a large number of African Americans lived, rather than in the central part of the city where all black children in the county could have easy access. Despite this setback, the schoolhouse was built.<sup>13</sup>

The 1888-89 Fort Worth city directory proudly presented a short history of city schools. This included the statistics that the number of black teachers for the colored schools increased from four in 1882 to six by 1884.<sup>14</sup> By 1886, the first city-funded public school opened for African Americans, the Ninth Street Colored School. In 1890, this school remained the only public school for blacks out of eleven public schools in the city. In Fort Worth by 1891, there were 3,478 white students taught by 133 white teachers—55 men and 78 women. In the same year, 14 African American teachers—6 men and 8 women—taught 709 black students. The student/teacher ratio was not the

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<sup>12</sup>Du Bois, *Souls*, 29.

<sup>13</sup>"Mass Meeting: Held by the Colored Citizens in Regard to Schools," *Fort Worth Daily Democrat*, 3 August 1881.

<sup>14</sup>*Morrison and Fourmy's General Directory of the City of Fort Worth: 1888-89* (Fort Worth, TX: Morrison and Fourmy, 1888), 46-47.

only thing that remained unfair for African Americans in their quest for education. The facilities for the black schoolhouse lacked the same quality as the white schools in the area, and educational materials were often used repeatedly through the years while white public schools were funded for updated materials and new books. These factors, however, did not keep Fort Worth blacks from pursuing an education, applying themselves to achieve better lives in the city, and confronting great racial hurdles in the new century.<sup>15</sup>

A newspaper article about a black Baptist meeting held on 15 September 1904, epitomized the typical racial attitudes within the city and state at the turn of the century. The author first introduced the Baptist group with what appeared to be a compliment, but which really was a double-edged sword by saying, “The delegates are composed of negroes of intelligence far above the average and the businesslike way in which the proceedings were started this morning argues well in their favor.”<sup>16</sup> Although the article writer thought the blacks present at the meeting were of high intelligence, the level of excellence the author described was not very high compared to white intelligence. In a speech presented at the meeting, Professor E. L. Blackshear, president of the African American school Prairie View State College, stated that black progress in Texas was the result of white help and support. Blackshear’s introduction of Texas Governor S. W. T. Lanham, the main speaker at the meeting, was enthusiastic about white aid and charity. What Blackshear failed to touch upon was African Americans progress because of their intelligence, hard work, and ambition. Blackshear’s speech seemed to echo Booker T.

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<sup>15</sup>Historical Census Browser, retrieved from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>, Date Accessed: 9 May 2006.

<sup>16</sup>“Negro Baptists Meet,” *Dallas Morning News*, 15 September 1904, 3.



Washington's famous speech at the 1895 Atlanta Cotton States Exposition. Washington spoke about working with white friends and colleagues to build up the black race in an effort to achieve equality. While both Blackshear and Washington may not have expounded upon African Americans attributes that would prove their ability to succeed, Blackshear followed Washington's example by encouraging blacks to work in concert with whites and attend black trade colleges. What appeared to be excessive exuberance about white aid was in fact a belief that carried over from the economic failure and chaos of Reconstruction. If blacks learned trades at schools such as Tuskegee in Alabama or Prairie View in Texas, which were funded by white support, the economy would remain stable and allow for eventual progressive action, including racial equality.<sup>17</sup>

Fort Worth blacks, though, did not allow apparent racial tensions to prevent them from gaining an education. In 1906 the main black school moved to a new location and was renamed the Negro High School. As Fort Worth grew, so did the number of schools, including African American elementary schools. By 1911 there were six elementary schools located in the black residential sections of town (primarily North, South, and West Fort Worth), nearby suburbs of Rosen Heights and Washington Heights, and outlying counties where two African American county district schools operated in Prairie Chapel and Riverside.<sup>18</sup> Despite this augmentation of available African American educational facilities, one "colored" high school catered to all African American students in Tarrant County and only went through the eleventh grade.<sup>19</sup> The 1910 census shows,

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<sup>17</sup>Booker T. Washington, "The Atlanta Exposition Address," September 18, 1895, *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1901), 98-101.

<sup>18</sup>*Morrison and Fourmy Directory Co.: Directory of the City of Fort Worth, 1909-1910*, 43-44.

<sup>19</sup>*Morrison and Fourmy Directory Co.: Directory of the City of Fort Worth, 1911-1912*, 4.

however, that the Fort Worth public schools only accommodated 10 percent of the black school-age population between six and fourteen years old. By 1920, 1,336 African American residents out of 18,730 in the city were illiterate. This translates into 7.13 percent of the black population not being able to read or write. Comparatively, only .54 percent of the city's native white residents, those born in the United States, were considered illiterate.<sup>20</sup>

In 1921, the Fort Worth high school for blacks was renamed I. M. Terrell High School, in honor of the first principal of the Ninth Street Colored School.<sup>21</sup> A 1924 overview of the city's growth identified nine high schools serving more than 27,000 students spread out through thirty-eight wards. In addition to these nine public schools, there were twelve private schools and many business colleges, but only a few of these schools were open to Fort Worth's black students.<sup>22</sup>

These schools were often run down and ill funded compared to white schools in the county. Despite the shortage of schools, teachers, and proper funding, black students in Fort Worth and surrounding Tarrant County could not necessarily complain of an inadequate education. The teachers did not pander to the belief that poverty or segregation guaranteed illiteracy or complacency with the status quo. They taught their students as well as they could, encouraged them to continue their education at black colleges in and around Texas, and pushed them to strive for the best. As a result, the percentage of illiterate black residents in Tarrant County decreased from 7.13 percent in

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<sup>20</sup>Historical Census Browser.

<sup>21</sup>Carol Roark, *Fort Worth & Tarrant County: An Historical Guide* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 2003), 92.

<sup>22</sup>Louis J. Wortham, *A History of Texas from Wilderness to Commonwealth* (Fort Worth, Texas: Wortham-Molyneaux Company, 1924), 235-38.

1920 to 6.45 percent ten years later.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, many black colleges within the United States focused on trade and technical training that consisted mainly of high school-level courses. Included in this trend was the Fort Worth Industrial and Mechanical College, which operated from 1909 until 1929.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, there were schools in Texas that promoted post-secondary studies, such as Paul Quinn College. Paul Quinn College was founded in Austin in 1872 by itinerant preachers of the African American Methodist Episcopal Church. The school later moved to Waco and then to Dallas. Prairie View A&M University began in 1876, the result of legislation stipulating the establishment of a mechanical and agricultural school for African Americans.<sup>25</sup>

Whether the two higher level schools opened due to religious impulses or governmental decree, statistics prove that African American Texans endeavored to do their best. In 1914 there were 129 students enrolled in college-level black colleges in Texas. By 1921, the number rose to 600 students, showing that while there were not higher educational opportunities in Fort Worth, the state's African American youth wanted to gain more knowledge.<sup>26</sup>

On 29 December 1909, the Negro State Teachers' Association met in Fort Worth to discuss the success and growth of the city's black public schools. Professor H. T. Davis brought attention to the "work of the negro teachers, showing their position in the

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<sup>23</sup>Garry Hamilton Radford, "Oral Memoirs of Garry Hamilton Radford: July 20, 1979-September 8, 1979," The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas; and Tim Madigan, "Fort Worth Star-Telegram: Separate but Superior," [www.pbs.org/weta/twoschools/thechallenge/telegram/](http://www.pbs.org/weta/twoschools/thechallenge/telegram/), Date Accessed: 18 February 2005.

<sup>24</sup>Alwyn Barr, *Black Texans: A History of African Americans in Texas, 1528-1995*, 2d ed. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 160.

<sup>25</sup>David Williams, "The History of Higher Education for Black Texans, 1872-1977" (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 1978), 75, 87.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

uplift of the negro race, and the importance of their being moral and intellectual lights in the country.”<sup>27</sup> This statement of pride within the African American community directly combats a statement made in the nearby newspaper, the *Milam County Vindicator*, from 1889, in which a white reporter wrote that blacks were “not yet the white man’s equal in moral and intellectual culture.”<sup>28</sup>

A contemporary of the author in the *Milam County Vindicator* spoke at the association meeting. Leroy Smith, president of the Board of Education, addressed the Fort Worth African American community: “You people should remember that you have friends right here in the South. Much has been said about the \$50,000 building which we are erecting for your people. We feel that we are doing our duty, and it is because you have a colored citizen, I. M. Terrell, who has proven himself worthy. . . . You can not get the white people to do for your people by abusing them.”<sup>29</sup> What Smith apparently was saying was that citizens of Fort Worth, or at least members of the Board of Education, were doing their duty because of one African American being worthy of such an endeavor. Smith’s comments seemed to say that the blacks’ white friends did not think the black citizens of Fort Worth deserved the same good education and proper facilities that white citizens possessed.

Despite Smith’s comments at the convention, the Reverend Dr. J. W. McKinney, the grand master of the black Masons and pastor at the C. M. E. Church, ended the meeting by lifting the congregation’s spirits and pride once again, proclaiming, “As a

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<sup>27</sup>“Negro Teachers’ Meeting,” *Dallas Morning News*, 30 December 1909, 7.

<sup>28</sup>“The State Press: What the Papers Throughout Texas are Talking About,” *Dallas Morning News*, 16 September 1889, 4.

<sup>29</sup>“Negro Teachers’ Meeting.”

people we must look to our own people. What the negro will be depends on what he does for himself rather than on what others may do for him.”<sup>30</sup> In other words, McKinney told those gathered at the meeting not to expect help from others. The Fort Worth black community, he believed, must persevere and succeed by its own strength and actions or else the white citizens of the city would continue to identify them as inferior to whites.

In 1920, one hundred black and white citizens founded a statewide reform group called the Texas Commission on Interracial Cooperation. African American and white leaders from across the state composed the commission and met to rally for equality in many areas of Texas life. Within five years of its conception, the organization became the largest interracial group focused on progressivism in the South. In the 1930s the group’s focus turned toward improving the status of African American education.<sup>31</sup> During the December 1938 meeting, the Texas Commission of Interracial Cooperation did not solely discuss general equal rights between the races in areas such as housing or justice. The commission also sought better opportunities for African American education in Texas, including a more extensive curriculum in public schools regarding health and citizenship. At the time, there were no in-state opportunities for African Americans in professional areas such as medicine and law. Edwin Elliott, Fort Worth’s regional chairman of the Federal Labor Relations Board, discussed two ways to help blacks in Texas—organizations, such as labor unions, and legislation sponsored by white men “who believe in democracy.” Elliott elaborated upon his thoughts about the unfair treatment blacks suffered in Texas and thus the educational barricades they faced.

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ruthe Wingarten, *Black Texas Women: 150 Years of Trial and Triumph*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 216.

In the South especially justice is often denied him. He is kept in his place as a sawer [sic] of wood and a drawer of water and the Negro does it cheerfully. A few by sheer determination and character educate themselves. But I know Negro college graduates who are porters and domestic servants, whereas 25,000 Negro scholastics in Texas are not enrolled in schools for lack of teachers. We have only one state college in Texas for this race to serve the 243,000 in the school system. Be it said to the credit of the Texas Negro and his white friends that there are eleven private Negro colleges. But there is not one that offers graduate work.

According to African American leaders present at the meeting, if the Texas State Legislature would provide funds to send eligible black students to out-of-state institutions, African Americans would become more civilized and improved socially and medically.<sup>32</sup>

Black families were not happy when their children had to attend the nearest all-black elementary schools. African American parents had to pay bus fare for their children to travel to either the nearest black elementary school or the only black high school, I. M. Terrell High School, while white schools were much closer to whites. Their choices became limited to either facing added expenses to send their children to school, or to taking them out of school due to the financial costs accrued by such enforcements. Whenever a large African American population moved into a previously all-white community, a school conflict usually arose as white student attendance dropped in nearby all-white schools. Rather than integrate, the school system would simply turn the school into an all-black school and send the white children to a white school. The same adjustment did not occur if African Americans complained about the distance their children needed to travel in order to attend an all-black school. There appear to be no documented cases in which African American families either tried to enroll their children into white schools or filed lawsuits against the Fort Worth school system for unfair

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<sup>32</sup>“Texas Urged to Give Negro More Rights.”

treatment before the 1950s. When the 1954 *Brown v. Board* ruling proclaimed that segregated schools were unconstitutional, Fort Worth ignored the Supreme Court decision.

Two years later, in 1956, the Fort Worth Board of Education voted against integrating black and white students. The board claimed its decision was based upon three factors that school desegregation would undermine. The board's first two claims were that the city had seen more of a rapid increase in the scholastic population in recent years than ever before, leading to critical shortages in school facilities. The third was a financial reason, although not what one might anticipate regarding a school desegregation issue. The city of Fort Worth, the board stated, recently had committed to a \$20 million building project, which was already underway.<sup>33</sup> Logistically the city could integrate its schools relatively smoothly and with the school buildings already in place. All that was required was to allow students to attend the schools nearest their residences, and, ideally each school would have roughly the same number of pupils attending. Any additional buildings and funding required would be the result of the influx of student population the board cited. The main financial burden of an integration plan, however, would go toward repairing and updating established African American schools to be adequate for white students' health and educational needs. If the Board of Education chose to, the cited \$20 million project could have been redirected and used toward other expenditures. The reasons given by the committee, however, were not strong enough for two Fort Worth African American families who took legal action to make educational equality a reality.

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<sup>33</sup>"Integration Ruled Out for Present: Board of Education Cites Many Problems Facing City Schools," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 9 August 1956.

In the fall of 1956 Herbert C. Teal and Air Force Sergeant Weirleis Flax Sr. tried to register their children into two separate Fort Worth white elementary schools—Peter Smith and Burton Hill.<sup>34</sup> When the schools refused to admit the children, Sergeant Flax took legal action against the Fort Worth public school system and received help from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Originally, the Fort Worth school system wanted the case dismissed or at least taken to the Texas Supreme Court, hoping the state’s high court would conclude that the *Brown* decision might lead to “confusion, frustration, and chaos” within the city.<sup>35</sup> Fort Worth Independent School District’s pleas for postponement, however, went unheard. United States District Judge Leo Brewster heard the case in 1961 with Clifford Davis, a NAACP lawyer, as the prosecuting attorney. As the only practicing African American lawyer in Fort Worth in the mid 1950s, Davis not only represented the NAACP, but also African Americans throughout the city.<sup>36</sup> Judge Brewster found the Fort Worth Independent School District in violation of the 1954 Supreme Court decision and ordered Fort Worth to create an integration plan for its public schools. The all-white school board delayed taking action until 1963, when Judge Brewster once again ordered them to create a plan of action, this time by threatening to cut federal funds if action did not take place.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>“Five Negroes Try to Enroll at Fort Worth,” *Dallas Morning News*, 5 September 1956, 4.

<sup>35</sup>Don Williams, “Schools Seek Dismissal of Integration Suit Here: Need for State High Court Ruling is Cited,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 19 November 1959.

<sup>36</sup>Clifford Davis belonged to the J. L. Turner Legal Association in Dallas, Texas during the mid 1950s because he was the only practicing lawyer in the city of Fort Worth at the time. When there were enough practicing African American lawyers in Fort Worth, the city established its own African American bar association. J. L. Turner Legal Association, Dallas, Texas, “The History of the J. L. Turner Legal Association,” [http://www.jltla.org/about\\_history.html](http://www.jltla.org/about_history.html), Date Accessed: 6 December 2006.

<sup>37</sup>Don McDowell, “US Court Says Schools Here Must Integrate, September Likely Date: No Appeal by City Seen,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 7 February 1963.



The Fort Worth public school board devised a stair-step plan starting in the 1963-64 school year, integrating first graders within their home districts, and desegregating adult educational programs. The local NAACP chapter constantly asked the school board for complete integration but the board always turned them down. Initially the school board planned to integrate one grade level per year, leading to complete desegregation by 1974. This plan fell through when the courts once again ordered the schools to desegregate sooner than later. The arrangement changed to allow at least two grade levels to integrate per year. In 1964, Fort Worth's kindergarten through second grades and the Technical High School desegregated. During the first year of integration, the school board permitted students in the lower grade levels of kindergarten through the second grade to attend the elementary schools in the districts where they lived. The outcome, however, showed that most students remained in segregated schools due to either segregated housing or predominantly white or black neighborhoods. The following year, third through sixth grade integrated, followed by the junior high schools in 1966, which included grade levels seven through nine. At the start of the 1967-68 school year, the rest of the city's high schools desegregated. The Fort Worth newspapers celebrated the fact that no violence of any kind occurred during the integration process, in contrast to Dallas or Little Rock, Arkansas.<sup>38</sup>

Just because mob riots or brutality did not occur does not mean white Fort Worth citizens willingly allowed their children to attend integrated schools. Many white families boycotted the integrated public schools and lowered school attendance by refusing to allow their children to attend school, moving to other school districts, or

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<sup>38</sup>“Integration Day Goes Routinely,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 5 September 1963; Pat Reed, “Fort Worth Elementary Schools Integrate: No Incidents,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 8 September 1965.

enrolling them in parochial schools. Consequently, the federal courts did not believe that the Fort Worth schools were integrated enough, so in 1971 mandatory busing came into effect to complete the integration process by breaking up predominately black schools and placing those students in formerly all-white facilities. While school districts provided free transportation to students, members of the African American community felt the pains of integration when their old, empty school buildings closed, and they believed that they still did not benefit from integration.<sup>39</sup>

White students and parents also believed this new school integration plan called them to sacrifice too much. Some parents talked about selling their homes and moving to Arlington or other suburbs where the court decision was not in effect, while other parents talked about withdrawing their children from public school and enrolling them in private institutions. Most complaints from white families took the form of feeling the need to move rather than force their children to ride a bus to a different school district, but the underlying cause was more than simply location. Many white parents did not want their children going to school with black students. Clifford Davis, now the local spokesman for the NAACP regarding the school integration plan, told the local media that the NAACP would not ask federal courts to include suburban school districts in the decision unless white flight to outlying communities left “an insufficient number of whites to integrate thoroughly schools within Fort Worth.”<sup>40</sup> Clifford and the NAACP had had

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<sup>39</sup>“Integration: From Stair-Step Plan of 1963 to Busing, 1971,” *The Fort Worth Press*, 3 October 1971; and Yamil Berard, “Looking Back Moving Forward . . . 50 years after Brown vs. the Board of Education,” [www.star-telegram.com/mld/interactivemedia/brown/brownved.html#story](http://www.star-telegram.com/mld/interactivemedia/brown/brownved.html#story); Date Accessed: 18 April 2005.

<sup>40</sup>“Fort Worth Integration May Bring ‘White Flight’,” *Dallas Morning News*, 16 November 1972.

enough of educational inequality and did not want to let this new opportunity to improve Fort Worth African American education vanish.

*Social Organizations: African American Unity and Leadership Within the City*

Although Fort Worth did not experience volatile civil rights action, most of the accomplishments would not have occurred if African Americans had not formed organizations available to help. Not all of the associations provided legal assistance like that provided by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to obtain changes in legislation, but they offered blacks opportunities during times when their social options within Fort Worth were few.

During the late nineteenth century, African American fraternal organizations abounded in Fort Worth. An 1890 city directory listed two all-male African American fraternal and relief societies: Rescue Lodge No. 20, A. F. and A. M. organized in 1886, and the Masonic Rescue Chapter No. 5, Order of the Eastern Star, organized in 1889. Subsequent pages list other organizations noted under the subheading “Miscellaneous and Relief.” These three other gender-based societies included the Ladies Lover Court No. 8, a women’s organization founded in 1887, the Seven Stars of Consolidation Lodge No. 19, organized in 1884, and the Order of Twelve Knights of Tabor, 777 and 333, No. 19.<sup>41</sup>

While the male fraternal organizations such as the Masons and the Odd Fellows generally are the first names that come to mind as local social organizations many female societies worked within the community as well. Female clubs and organizations in Texas and Fort Worth acted as networks for social gatherings, volunteering in the community,

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<sup>41</sup>*D.S. Clark’s City Directory of the Inhabitants, Manufacturing Establishments, Institutions, Business Firms, etc. in the City of Fort Worth, Texas* (Fort Worth, TX: TX Printing and Lithography Co., 1890), 32, 35.

and leadership bases to rally for common issues regarding health, family, education, and morality. The first national African American organization, the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) founded in 1896, incorporated other regional and state groups already in existence. Between 1899 and 1901, the Phillis Wheatley Club of Fort Worth joined the national organization. In 1905, a statewide group, called the Texas Federation of Colored Women's Clubs formed. The first state president of the new federation was Mrs. M. E. Y. Moore, an Eastern Star leader from Fort Worth. Moore issued a call to Texas African American women to "improve the home, moral, and social life in Texas communities." This cry for improvement also held elements of unity for all Texas black women.<sup>42</sup>

Female organizations also used their influence and camaraderie to promote change, safety, and unity. During the time of widespread lynching, African American societies such as the NACW and local black sororities banded together to attempt to put a stop to the violence against their race. The year 1922 saw the formation of an official state anti-lynching group. The National Anti-Lynching Crusaders organized a Texas branch and voted R. A. Ethel Ransom, a Fort Worth nurse and local leader, as state director. The organization's motto read "One Million Women United to Suppress Lynching," and to accomplish this task they planned to raise \$1 million to lobby against the violence.<sup>43</sup>

As white middle class residents created their own progressive organizations to battle immorality in Fort Worth, African American middle class founded two reform

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<sup>42</sup>Winegarten, *Black Texas Women*, 190. Subsequent names for the Texas Federation of Colored Women's Clubs were the Texas Association of Colored Women's Clubs and the Texas Association of Women's Clubs.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 218.

societies—the Afro-American Citizens’ Conference and the Colored Progressive Club. While African Americans wanted more equality in the city during the late nineteenth century, their other focus laid with the red light district located in their neighborhood.<sup>44</sup>

The NAACP was the most nationally prominent organization that stepped in to help Texas African Americans. The first NAACP chapter established in Texas was in El Paso in 1915, followed by four more branches in 1918. The Fort Worth branch was active at various times before 1937, when the Texas State Conference of Branches formed, giving the NAACP a strong, statewide foundation. During the 1960s, the organization focused mainly on school integration and discrimination lawsuits. Its work with the Flax case, a lawsuit against the Fort Worth public school board in 1961, led to the city’s school desegregation. In subsequent years, the local NAACP branch asked for complete integration, rather than the stair-step plan the school board adopted, and for teacher integration. Because desegregation in Fort Worth came relatively peacefully, African Americans did not have a great need for the NAACP’s legal services and neither of the branch’s requests went to court.<sup>45</sup> Rather, during the 1950s and 1960s they required monetary help and social opportunities.

The organization that Fort Worth blacks turned to most often concerning economic issues was the National Urban League (NUL). Established in 1910, the NUL began as a bi-racial social service organization. During the 1950s when the NUL was most active in Fort Worth, the organization sought to create a better understanding

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<sup>44</sup>Richard F. Selcer, *Hell’s Half Acre: The Life and Legend of a Red Light District* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1991), 221.

<sup>45</sup>The Fort Worth NAACP branch is still active and operating, continuing to provide legal help to those who have discrimination complaints. Max B. Baker, “Partnership Offers Free Legal Clinics,” [www.dfw.com/mld/startelegram/2004/04/14/news/local/8419878.htm](http://www.dfw.com/mld/startelegram/2004/04/14/news/local/8419878.htm), Date Accessed: 22 January 2005. For more information about NAACP activity in Texas, see Michael Gillette, “The NAACP in Texas, 1937-1957” (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, 1984).

between blacks and whites and to improve African American living and working conditions. Rather than raising the money themselves, the organization sponsored progressive action such as creating better housing in poor black communities.<sup>46</sup> They accomplished this with money from the United Fund program. The United Fund program acted as a community chest, sponsoring other organizations such as “Sr.-Try-Hi-Y” for teenagers and younger children, the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) with a specific section for African Americans, and a Child Care Center for black mothers.<sup>47</sup> According to the executive director of the National Urban League, Whitney M. Young, Jr., pressure from the Ku Klux Klan forced the Fort Worth Urban League out of commission in 1956.<sup>48</sup> When told that the Klan had not had any discernable movement in Fort Worth since the 1920s, Young then attributed the League’s demise to the White Citizens Council.

At the beginning of 1969, fifty Fort Worth African American youths stepped up to help reduce the amount of fear and violence occurring in their neighborhoods. On a Thursday night, 20 March 1969, these students met with city officials to organize a unity task force to combat problems arising between several black high schools, including shootings and gang fights.<sup>49</sup> Later, local organizations circulated publications that attempted to bring awareness of African American history to the city’s black community. The Black Citizens Concerned with the Bicentennial published *Fort Worth: The Black*

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<sup>46</sup>“Fort Worth Lags in Race Work, League Head Says,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 16 July 1951.

<sup>47</sup>Blair Justice, “Agencies for Negro Boys and Girls Benefited by United Fund Program,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 5 September 1956.

<sup>48</sup>“Negro Leader Warns Texas Riots Possible,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 1 December 1966.

<sup>49</sup>“Negro Students Organize Group to Ease Friction,” *Dallas Morning News*, 21 March 1969, 4.

*Perspective* in 1976.<sup>50</sup> This was not meant to be a piece of historical work, but rather, was designed to inspire Fort Worth's African American community to dig deeper into its heritage and roots.

Other organizations also rose up to take on a new role in Fort Worth and African American issues. These foundations did not work necessarily only for the black citizen. Rather, they worked to fill a need for multi-racial dialogue and unity created when desegregation and Jim Crow laws fell and a hopeful, integrated community began. Two relatively recent organizations in Texas are the Fort Worth Coalition for Community Change and the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). The Coalition for Community Change works together with three racial "neighborhoods" (white, African American, and Hispanic) to bring about community change. The group's main goals are to assess progress, respond appropriately to changing issues, and provide leadership development training and support within the community. The IAF focuses on inter-racial cooperation by "tapping" into the community's religious base to create a factor of trust between people.<sup>51</sup> The IAF institute founded in Fort Worth in 1982 is called the Allied Communities of Tarrant [County] (ACT). This organization seeks to unite white, African American, and Hispanic community leaders to create local organizations while allowing room for racial autonomy within this coalition.<sup>52</sup>

These new organizations are not superfluous since African Americans in Fort Worth, Texas, are now allowed to drink from the same water fountain as white citizens.

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<sup>50</sup>Black Citizens Concerned with the Bicentennial, *Fort Worth: The Black Perspective* (Fort Worth, Texas, 1976).

<sup>51</sup>"Past Projects," [www.mdcinc.org/past\\_projects.htm#Fort%20Worth](http://www.mdcinc.org/past_projects.htm#Fort%20Worth), Date Accessed: 28 April 2005.

<sup>52</sup>Mark R. Warren, "IAF in Texas: Creating a Multi-Racial Democratic Community: Case Study of the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation," [www.tresser.com/iafin.htm](http://www.tresser.com/iafin.htm), Date Accessed: 28 April 2005.

People in Fort Worth, as well as the United States in general, can still hold prejudices against one another, and discrimination still exists. These coalitions between the three main racial groups in Texas fill the latest need in American society: to understand all people and to try to build a bridge over the fissures our history has created.



## CHAPTER SIX

### Race Relations: From Violence to Resolution

The early years of Fort Worth's history were not devoid of instances of tension between white residents and black slaves within the community. As in other slave states, slaveholders and the surrounding citizens in Tarrant County feared slave riots and revolts while the city was still Fort Town. There was violence between whites and African Americans, but the violence was not exclusively between the different races. As was evident in a specific instance in the 1850s, Fort Town's white citizens felt threatened by anyone, white or black, who interfered with their way of life.

Texas, along with other slaveholding states, experienced northern and southern abolitionists who came into cities and towns arguing about the legality and morality of slavery to the citizens. Most Fort Worth citizens did not own slaves so their overall opinion nearing the Civil War was more like anti-abolitionist than pro-slavery.<sup>1</sup> Fort Worth witnessed such abolitionist arguments in the late 1850s, when most of the debates occurred in white meeting places, and the abolitionists would simply pass through afterward. Charles Ellis Mitchell, an early resident of Fort Worth, arrived in the city in May 1856 as a child and remembered various abolitionist speakers coming to town who riled up the citizens.<sup>2</sup> One incident in particular remained vivid to Mitchell and another

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<sup>1</sup>Leonard Sanders, *How Fort Worth Became the Texasmost City* (Fort Worth, TX: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1973).

<sup>2</sup>Mack Williams, "He Played in the Old Army Fort," in *In Old Fort Worth: The Story of a City and its People as Published in the News-Tribune in 1976 and 1977* (Fort Worth, TX: Mack H. Williams and Madeline C. Williams, 1977), 44-45.

anonymous early citizen for many years afterward, especially because it created more of an uproar than usual.

In the summer of 1860, two male abolitionists came to Fort Worth—the Reverend Anthony Bewley, a Methodist minister, and William Crawford.<sup>3</sup> Not only did the two men stay longer than usual within the city, they also spoke directly to the slaves at a small meeting place where the slaves were allowed to have church, telling them to rise against their masters to gain freedom. Ned Purvis, a slave present for the abolitionist meetings, felt loyal to his master and immediately told him what the two white men said at the meeting. At the same time of their visit, mysterious fires broke out in the Fort Worth business district and elsewhere in the state causing a heightened sense of danger and fear among white citizens. After hearing the information from Purvis, a mob formed the next day and immediately hanged Crawford on a pecan tree at the intersection of the Jacksboro and White Settlement roads. Bewley escaped and made it up to Springfield, Missouri, where the mob tracked him after he fled. Bewley was returned to Fort Worth on charges of being involved in an arson plot and hanged by a mob on 13 September 1860, on the same tree where Crawford was hanged. Mitchell's recollection of the events seems to indicate that he believed, along with other Fort Worth citizens, in the justification of the lynching of Bewley and Crawford. The actual account of the events in Mitchell's memoir runs for only a few sentences, and the last parting thoughts on the topic described how someone threw Bewley and Crawford's bones on top of a building's roof, forgotten and barely recalled correctly.<sup>4</sup> Such remarks indicate that in the years

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<sup>3</sup>Joseph Bandor, *Memoirs of Tarrant County Confederate Veterans and Others of Post-War Period* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University, 1960), 6.

<sup>4</sup>Williams, "He Played in the Old Army Fort," 45.

before the Civil War, especially in this specific instance, those who believed in slavery tolerated abolitionists within the city if they did not cause trouble, but did not trust them or take enough interest to bury their bodies.

The treatment of white abolitionists by Fort Town's white residents portrays a desire to retain tradition and a sense of normalcy within the county. They did not want the institution of slavery to disappear for two reasons. The first was that a majority of white Texans believed in the inferiority of blacks, even though there were a few free African Americans in the state. To many Texans, slavery made sense and should remain a steadfast establishment. Second, white residents were not ready for the institution of slavery to be abolished. The state's economy was agricultural and ranch-based, which required slave labor. To take forced labor away would lower annual harvests and revenue and thereby hurt white Texan farmers, ranchers, and the other residents who were dependant upon local food and cotton products.

Although the city of Fort Worth grew exponentially after the Civil War, it did not escape the racial problems that plagued southern cities after the war and Reconstruction. White attitudes toward African Americans created rifts within the community as blacks tried to adjust to their new status as freedmen and to become citizens. Across Fort Worth there loomed white anger and annoyance toward blacks. The *Fort Worth Daily Democrat*, the city's major newspaper, often published stories portraying African Americans as lazy, idle, violent, and subversive. The articles usually described two blacks of the same sex fighting each other behind a saloon and the police having to get involved and hauling one or both to jail.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>"A Bad Nigger," *Fort Worth Daily Democrat*, 13 January 1878 (at Birch Brothers Saloon on Rusk Street); "Two Spirited Negro Wenches," *Fort Worth Daily Democrat*, 27 December 1877 (by the

Similar to other southern towns, Fort Worth experienced lynchings and hangings in a crude form of so-called justice. Two incidents occurred in the early years of the Texas city. Lou Skelton, an African American born in 1862 and previously owned by Colonel Terry, remembered two hangings in Fort Worth. One occurred just after the Civil War. The specific information about the event remains uncertain, but Skelton recalled seeing a black man whose last name was Capps hanging from a tree by Cold Springs Road and wearing a blue Union uniform. Without further information it is difficult to determine if a trial preceded Capps's hanging. Considering the outcome of the war and the fact that he wore a Union uniform, however, leads to the conclusion that local citizens angered by losing the war and seeing an African American in a traitorous blue Union uniform, lynched Capps.<sup>6</sup>

Skelton, a former slave, recalled another hanging in 1874 during an interview sixty years later.<sup>7</sup> She called the victim Jim Braggs, but his actual first name was Sol. Sol Braggs's hanging for the murder of Matthew Green the year before took place on the afternoon of 1 May 1874 on gallows built outside the city limits. Approximately four thousand people attended the execution of the six-foot man and saw him ride up to the scaffold in a wagon, sitting on his own coffin. At the gallows, he spoke to the crowd assembled before him, advising young people to stay at home and work for a living, and claiming his innocence. Braggs declared that his partner, Baz Moulden, killed Matthew

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Alamo Saloon on the Square); "Africans at War," *Fort Worth Daily Democrat*, 2 March 1878 (behind Bohardt's Saloon).

<sup>6</sup>"In Old Fort Worth: Colonel Terry and the Slave Girl," in Williams, *Old Fort Worth*, 12.

<sup>7</sup>"Colonel Terry and the Slave Girl," in Williams, *Old Fort Worth*, 12.

Green, but the witnesses at his trial lied.<sup>8</sup> If the witnesses had lied at the trial, did the court even truly care whether Braggs was guilty or not? The justice system was not the kindest toward blacks convicted of crimes against white citizens.

A prime example within Fort Worth that proves unjust treatment toward African Americans was an incident that occurred when William Oliver, white, murdered George Howard, black, in Hell's Half Acre. The treatment of white men who killed black men was not as harsh as that of black men who killed white men. A jury trial of his peers charged Oliver with negligent homicide, claiming, "The defense was that the killing was purely accidental, the defendant not knowing the pistol with which he killed Howard was loaded."<sup>9</sup> The verdict delivered by the jury was guilty, but Oliver's punishment for the offense was to spend sixty days in the county jail. The accidental killing of a black man in the Fort Worth court system in the late 1800s resulted in what seems like a mere slap on the wrist compared to the very public hanging of Braggs just a decade earlier.<sup>10</sup>

Other violence went unnoticed on a daily basis. In a jovial newspaper article written in 1878, a reporter described an "every day scene" of young boys hurling objects at a young black boy in a busy market square in Fort Worth.

A crowd of young lads around with sacks and bags half full of cotton, pelting away at a ten year old negro boy, who had presumed to come on the square and gather cotton with them. "Take that, and that, and that! Ye liver color'd coon."

The way those four or five young thoroughbreds imposed on that helpless negro boy was a caution: it would be safe to add that he was completely "barred out" of the

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<sup>8</sup>B. B. Paddock, ed., "Execution of Sol Bragg: The Last Act in the Drama of Life of this Remarkable Negro," *Fort Worth Democrat*, 2 May 1874.

<sup>9</sup>"Fort Worth's Bad Water," *Dallas Morning News*, 29 June 1887, 3.

<sup>10</sup>Ten men were hanged legally in Fort Worth, Texas between 1874 and 1918. Of those ten, seven of them were African Americans. Richard F. Selcer, *Fort Worth: A Texas Original!* (Austin, TX: Texas State Historical Association, 2004), 42.

limits of the square, and never again will his little darky fingers pick loose cotton out of every farmer's wagon.<sup>11</sup>

No one paid attention to the violence inflicted upon the little boy. The author of the article even described the event with a sense of great pride and accomplishment, as if the white boys had done the marketplace a favor.

Young white boys were not the only ones threatening African Americans. The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) had a presence in Texas in the years following the Civil War and proved a very real menace to black Texans. The original Ku Klux Klan formed after the Civil War in 1865 by Confederate veterans, was a paramilitary organization that opposed the new amendments to the Constitution that freed slaves, protected their civil rights, and allowed them to vote. The Klan used violent measures to promote their ideas of white supremacy and to force federal troops and Republicans from the South during Reconstruction. In 1868, the Klan formed in Texas appearing in small, loosely organized groups in large Texas cities. Most Klan activity in Texas during the nineteenth century occurred in Northeast Texas and extended down to Houston. The following year, General Nathan Bedford Forrest, one of the Klan's co-founders, officially disbanded the national organization because he believed the group had lost sight of the original purpose he believed in—to protect southern women and white supremacy—and had become too extreme in its tactics. Despite the official end of the Klan, separate pocket groups within Texas popped up occasionally to march through little towns or terrorize anyone who either sympathized with the freedmen or stood in the group's way.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>“An Every Day Scene: The Boys on the Square,” *Fort Worth Daily Democrat*, 6 December 1878.

<sup>12</sup>Ku Klux Klan history research came from: “Ku Klux Klan,” <http://en.wikipedia.org/>

Andy Nelson, an ex-slave, remembered how ten to twelve years after the Civil War, the KKK was active in the area around Fort Worth and often threatened African Americans who were involved in “devilment.”<sup>13</sup> In July 1878, Nelson had a run-in with a KKK group led by Sam Bass. Aside from Nelson being scared and verbally questioned about his intentions on the road, the group left Nelson alone.<sup>14</sup> Other black Texans were not as fortunate. William Hamilton, an ex-slave from Tarrant County, remembered how freed blacks had problems with the KKK, including physical violence. Hamilton remembered at least three people whipped by the Klan: Faith Walden, Jeb Johnson, and Dan Hester. Only one person stood up to the Klan according to Hamilton’s memory—Jean Benson. When Klan members came to her house unexpectedly, Benson defied the Klan long enough to throw embers in their faces and run away before they had a chance to do anything to her.<sup>15</sup>

The crime of lynching continued into the early twentieth century in the form of vigilante justice. In 1921, Fort Worth’s white citizens took a stand against David Bunn when Bunn, an African American, was charged with raiding a group of whites staying at a cabin by Lake Worth. A mob gathered in early October to take Bunn from jail and

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wiki/Ku\_Klux\_Klan, Date Accessed: 18 February 2005; and *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. “Ku Klux Klan,” [www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/KK/vek2.html](http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/KK/vek2.html), Date Accessed: 18 February 2005. For more information on the KKK, see Charles C. Alexander, *Crusade for Conformity: The Ku Klux Klan in Texas, 1920-1930* (Houston, TX: Texas Gulf Coast Historical Association, 1962), and Charles C. Alexander, “Invisible Empire in the Southwest: The Ku Klux Klan in Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Arkansas, 1920-1930” (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, 1962).

<sup>13</sup>USWPA, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mesn&fileName=163/mesn163.db&recNum=150&itemLink=D?mesnbib:1.:/temp/~ammem\\_01Hi:](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mesn&fileName=163/mesn163.db&recNum=150&itemLink=D?mesnbib:1.:/temp/~ammem_01Hi:), accessed 17 February 2006.

<sup>14</sup>A week after the group approached Andy Nelson, Sam Bass was wounded in a gun battle at Round Rock on 19 July 1878. Texas Rangers captured Bass on July 20 and the following day, Bass died from his wounds. Tom Flinty, Jr., “Death of Sam Bass Occurred in 1878,” *Dallas Morning News*, 8 July 1923.

<sup>15</sup>Zeke Handler, ed., “Memories of Tarrant County Slaves,” in Williams, *In Old Fort Worth*, 13.

lynch him as punishment rather than stand by and allow the legal system to punish Bunn. According to the *Dallas Morning News*, the mob was so intent on taking justice upon Bunn because “the robbery of the Lake Worth camping party was the climax of a series of brutal attacks in and near Fort Worth and citizens were greatly aroused.”<sup>16</sup> To avoid a potential lynching, authorities took Bunn to the Dallas County jail after Bunn’s indictment Thursday afternoon, 6 October 1921. A mob formed outside the Tarrant County jail a few hours after Bunn’s removal to Dallas County. Sheriff Smith, in charge of the Tarrant County jail, allowed fifteen men from the mob to search the jail for Bunn, even though Smith knew Bunn was not there. While the fifteen-man committee looked inside the jail in Fort Worth, the mob grew to approximately a thousand people. After finding no trace of Bunn, the mob searched the Fort Worth city jail and then decided to investigate Dallas. Sheriff Smith’s men followed the mob to the Fort Worth city jail, heard the rallying cry to head to Dallas, and informed Smith, who called the Dallas county jail, to be prepared for the coming mob. When a crowd of fifty people, composed mostly of young men, came the following Friday morning to the Dallas jail, Sheriff Harston did not allow the mob inside the building to search for Bunn. The mob did not press further because of lack of leadership and firearms to force their way inside. Despite the law’s protection, Bunn’s death did not come in the form of a hanging, but rather while he was in transit from the Dallas County jail back to Fort Worth on 11 October 1921. Rather than surrendering himself into the hands of the lynch mob, Bunn jumped out of the moving vehicle when he saw four trucks on the road to Fort Worth. The policemen who had been trying to protect him from the Fort Worth mob shot Bunn three times after he jumped. The trucks, which Bunn thought belonged to the lynching mob, were actually

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<sup>16</sup>“Mob Fails to Get Negro Held Here,” *Dallas Morning News*, 8 October 1921.



shipping packinghouse products to Dallas.<sup>17</sup> The ironic twist of David Bunn's death, though violent, possibly saved him from a more gruesome fate if the Fort Worth mob had apprehended him.

Even if no violence occurred, the mere thought of sexually mixing the races disturbed the great majority of white Fort Worth citizens. A local black church gave a concert at Huffman's Hall Friday night, 16 April 1875, and young white men of the city attended. The *Fort Worth Democrat* reflected an overall general distaste for African Americans, especially socializing between white and black. "While it might be reasonably expected that the colored race, would, [in isolated] cases, take advantage of the law and endeavor to force themselves upon the white, we did not think a solitary instance would ever be placed upon record when any man, or set of men, with pure caucasian [sic] blood coursing in their veins would ever so far forget their self-respect, or that of their race, as to mix socially with the colored race." The same article alleged that the event "so shocked an honest negro that he immediately took his family away, from 'de place whar sich carryin's on were gwine on.'" <sup>18</sup> While it is difficult to determine whether the author really discussed the situation in which an African American father attended the concert, it is clear that the author despised the black race. This overall feeling of superiority and disdain for any colored race often had the desired effect. Condemning any mixing of the races, be it social or sexual, created a heightened feeling of immorality. While it may be true that a large majority of Fort Worth's black population could not, or would not, read the *Fort Worth Democrat*, it is difficult to

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<sup>17</sup>"Fort Worth Negro Shot by Officers," *Dallas Morning News*, 12 October 1921, 9.

<sup>18</sup>"Civil Rights; Disgraceful Conduct," *Fort Worth Democrat*, 17 April 1875.

imagine an African American hearing about the article or seeing how they were treated without feeling socially demeaned.

At an African American Baptist convention on 15 September 1904, Texas Governor Samuel W. T. Lanham gave a speech that portrayed a type of hypocritical sentiment often portrayed by leading white figures at the turn of the century. He meant to deliver his words as compliments to his African American audience, but in reality, his words were tinged with black stereotypes.<sup>19</sup> In his speech, Lanham did give a true compliment as he talked about black progress for the best—“Did history ever furnish such an instance of a people just emerging from slavery? Go on with your good work. Do good; uphold the law.”<sup>20</sup> That compliment, however, quickly reverted to prevailing racial attitudes. At the end of the speech Lanham said, “In addition to keeping out of partisan parties I would advise that you respect the social limitations between the races. If these are transcended there will be trouble.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, Lanham told the congregation that they may have made social progress, but they should not assume that they were equal to white citizens.

In common with Texas Governor Lanham’s speech, other white office holders attempted to disguise any prejudicial remarks or undertones with compliments or an overall concern for the good of the community. Fort Worth’s mayor in 1910, William D. Davis, embodied such concern when he suggested that the Fort Worth City Commission

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<sup>19</sup>“Negro Baptists Meet,” *Dallas Morning News*, 15 September 1904, 3. Lanham’s remarks included phrases such as: “Nobody in the world can sing like negroes;” “My nurse was a good old negro woman;” “Don’t be afraid of the word negro; it has the same distinction as either the words Mongolian or Caucasian [sic];” and “Your race has made great progress in learning, in morality and in good citizenship.”

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

should ban a filmed boxing match between Jack Johnson and Jim Jeffries from being shown in local theaters.<sup>22</sup> Davis and Commissioner George Mulkey thought that showing the prizefight, which took place in Reno, Nevada, would invoke negative feelings between whites and blacks in Fort Worth. The fight on 4 July 1910 between Johnson, black, and Jeffries, white, resulted in Johnson winning the match. The mayor and the commission were against showing the fight, not just because it was violent, but mainly because the fight was between a black man and a white man in which the black man won. In Mayor Davis's letter to the Commission, he stated, "The big prize fight between a white man and a negro has been pulled off in Reno, Nev., and has made a shameful page in American history."<sup>23</sup> Davis's reaction to the fight between Johnson and Jeffries reflected a larger belief about white and African American race relations in his city. Many white Americans believed that the two races should be completely separated and forced to remain in their own community spheres of life. Such spheres include living, working, learning, and recreation. This separation of races was so predominant that white citizens during the late nineteenth century even helped hide the African American presence in Fort Worth by leaving few published clues about their importance to the city. Such lack of evidence indicates that whites did not consider blacks as integral citizens. A published photograph collection from 1889 showing the highlights of the Texas city depicted many prominent white business establishments and

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<sup>22</sup>"Prize Fight Pictures Forbidden in Fort Worth," *Dallas Morning News*, 6 July 1910.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

homes. The only black pictured in the entire book was a woman wearing a simple dress sitting by the front door of “Fort Worth’s first house,” a little log cabin.<sup>24</sup>

A surge in the city’s economy and more job opportunities during the first thirty years of the twentieth century attracted a large number of African Americans, causing the black population to grow. Fort Worth’s facilities expanded due to the influx and yet African Americans remained second-class citizens. The city’s African American population continued demanding equal rights and fair treatment in a city where they remained the minority, without giving up their African heritage. In 1935, a group of one hundred Fort Worth blacks volunteered to go to Ethiopia to fight and “spill their blood in behalf of [their] native land” in case war broke out between Italy and the realm of Emperor Haile Selassie.<sup>25</sup>

At the second annual Texas Commission of Interracial Cooperation (TCIC) meeting on 2 December 1938, Dr. Edwin Elliott, the Fort Worth regional chairman for the Federal Labor Relations Board, opened his statements with an acknowledgement of white Americans’ past egregious actions: “What we do with our minorities in America is a reasonable test of our democracy. We have tried slavery for the Negro but Christianity told us that was the wrong way. . . . In our smugness and desire to exploit these minorities we thwarted their hopes to gain place and prestige among us.” From there, Elliott pointed out injustices the African American population continued to face in Texas. These discriminations included lack of equality in economic opportunities, “no hotel accommodations even for distinguished Negro artists appearing on white religious or civic programs,” and exclusion from many civic and political rights. Elliott was outraged

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<sup>24</sup>D. H. Swartz, *Photographs of Fort Worth* (Fort Worth, TX: Cor. Houston and Fifth Sts, 1889).

<sup>25</sup>“Texas Group May Enlist,” *New York Times*, 14 July 1935, 3.

about the black exclusion from political primaries in Texas. He called these exclusions “disgracefully undemocratic as it excludes the Negro from a voice in the selection of all county and state officers, although [blacks] must live under [the elected] administration.” During the meeting, Elliott asked for a host of better opportunities for Texas blacks that included equal pay for equal work, ability to earn an adequate standard of living, and protection from “mob fury [and] from illegal trials which all too often are based upon mistaken identity, caprice or prejudice.”<sup>26</sup> Despite the interracial equality the TCIC promoted, the meetings remained segregated, with white men and women meeting in the afternoon and black men and women meeting in the evening. Despite the TCIC’s existence and insistence for black equal rights, the African American community in Fort Worth continued an uphill battle for equality for another thirty years into the 1960s and 1970s.

### *City Segregation and the Efforts to Create Unity*

Fort Worth slipped into segregation easily at the city’s beginnings. Texas was a slave state before the Civil War and, thus, Fort Worth’s social structure became a direct product of the state’s history. As freed blacks moved to the Texas community, they created their own businesses and schools, but still had to rely on white hospitals and specialties that remained solely white controlled. Jim Crow laws and segregated society extended into the 1950s and touched recreational areas, public transportation, and businesses such as restaurants, hotels, department stores, and theaters. In the mid-twentieth century specific Fort Worth public parks, zoos, swimming pools, and golf courses remained closed to black citizens. The only day of the year blacks could legally

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<sup>26</sup>“Texas Urged to Give Negro More Rights,” *Dallas Morning News*, 3 December 1938.

visit these all-white areas was on Juneteenth, when the all-white city government lifted the invisible barrier. The citywide black freedom celebration started to dwindle in 1953 after a group of African American ministers in Fort Worth objected to the blatant inequality portrayed on a day that signified their right to have equal access to all areas within the city.<sup>27</sup> What was the use of celebrating an event that obviously meant nothing to those who controlled city laws and purposefully barred them from enjoying the freedoms Juneteenth indicated? Fort Worth African Americans continued to push for equal access to recreational facilities in the city. They requested entrée to the zoo, public pools, golf courses, and parks or the creation of their own facilities. Unfortunately, the city government did not adopt either option. Instead, the issues seemed to meld into other segregation protests occurring in the 1950s.

In December 1951, police arrested Mrs. Essie B. Sturgess for breaking the Fort Worth Transit Company's segregation ordinance by sitting near a white girl on a public bus. The local bus company's policies stated that whites must sit from the front of the bus and take seats leading back, while blacks sat in the back of the bus and filled seats forward. This transportation ordinance began in 1905 when it applied to streetcars and carried over into the 1950s.<sup>28</sup> When thirty-nine-year-old Sturgess first boarded the bus, she stayed standing because the bus was full. Throughout the ride, whites progressively got off until only African Americans remained. Weary from standing, Sturgess sat down near other blacks. Subsequently, a white girl boarded the vehicle and decided to sit next to Sturgess. Seeing the two races sitting near each other on a bus with vacant seats, the

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<sup>27</sup>Chester Rosson, "Juneteenth," [www.texasmonthly.com/ranch/readme/juneteenth.php](http://www.texasmonthly.com/ranch/readme/juneteenth.php), Date Accessed: 18 April 2005.

<sup>28</sup>Selcer, *Fort Worth*, 42.

bus driver, C. B. Beck, grew angry and ordered Sturgess to move to another seat. When she refused to change seats, the bus driver called the police who arrested Sturgess at the next stop. Essie Sturgess did not stay in jail for long after paying a \$10 cash bond. The trial took place three weeks after the incident on 28 December 1951 before Judge W. H. Gilmartin in front of a courtroom filled with African Americans. Sturgess's attorney, Coleman Cline, did not need to defend his client during the trial because the city's prosecuting attorney, Tom Chapman, suggested the case be thrown out due to insufficient evidence. According to Beck, no seats were available behind Sturgess on the bus, therefore making the issue a moot point since Sturgess did not have an alternative seating choice. Judge Gilmartin agreed with Chapman and dismissed the case.<sup>29</sup>

African Americans composed approximately 15 to 20 percent of all Fort Worth transit customers. To incur their wrath would result in a similar profit loss that occurred later in Montgomery, Alabama. Four years after the Sturgess case, the Supreme Court ruled the end of bus segregation throughout the nation. It was then that the city of Fort Worth decided to end the segregation ordinance on Fort Worth buses. City officials claimed that the end of segregated transit edicts passed due to the Supreme Court ruling, even though it is more likely that the city government wanted to stop a possible protest and profit loss before it began.<sup>30</sup> A family-owned business followed suit to protect its revenue and avoid a public protest only six years later in 1960 as African Americans in Fort Worth wanted access to more than public transportation.

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<sup>29</sup>“Woman Arrested on Bus; Free on Bond,” *Fort Worth The Call*, 14 December 1951; “Trial Set for Negro Woman who Refused to Move in Bus,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 13 December 1951, 15; “Bus Seat Case Against Negro is Dismissed,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 29 December 1951, 2. Richard F. Selcer suggests that the case was dismissed to “avoid an embarrassing public spectacle and possible racial conflict.” Selcer, *Fort Worth*, 46.

<sup>30</sup>John Ohendalski, “Ruling May Halt Bus Segregation in Fort Worth,” *Fort Worth Press*, 14 November 1956.

At a time when most white establishments refused to give service to black patrons, Marvin Leonard gladly allowed African Americans into his department store; however, they still were not allowed to sit at the lunch-counter, eat from the buffet, or use the white bathrooms or water fountain. Despite the Jim Crow restrictions, blacks frequently shopped at Leonard Brothers and maintained a good reputation with the owner and vice versa. The downtown department store was a landmark in Fort Worth since the store's opening in 1918. Leonard's always served both white and African American customers and focused on making them feel at home. The store had a progressive nature within the city, but the owners remained wary of controversy. For example, an incident in the 1940s occurred where an employee served an African American customer at the sandwich counter before a white customer. The white customer complained to the management and Leonard chose to exclude blacks from that service counter and eventually made segregated sandwich stands. This line of thinking, however, began to change in the 1950s. Due to the changing residential pattern after World War Two where more African Americans lived in town while whites moved into the suburbs, Leonard's clientele changed to a predominantly black customer base. Leonard took a great chance on the day he took down the "white-only" and "colored-only" signs from around his store in 1960. Earlier that year, black youths demonstrated in Greensboro and Nashville, thus initiating the sit-in movement throughout the southern states. Days before Leonard removed the signs from his store a small group of Fort Worth black young adults blocked the Leonard Brothers department store entrance. Leonard knew that desegregation must end in Fort Worth, Texas eventually. When he weighed the pros and cons concerning the impact his action would have on business, Leonard decided that he would rather retain



the 15 to 30 percent black patronage his store brought in and possibly sacrifice the remaining white 70 percent rather than turn his back on progress. Desegregation at Leonard Brother's came silently with few complaints. The denoted race signs came down without ceremony and the managers told the employees at the lunch counter to serve anyone who wanted to eat.<sup>31</sup> Leonard's decision led his store to become the first desegregated business in Fort Worth.<sup>32</sup> Three years later, when the public school system could no longer stave off the federal court's insistence to integrate, the rest of Fort Worth's businesses desegregated. Restaurants, hotels, theaters, and department and drug stores took down their signs and invisible barriers. African Americans were welcome, as long as they intended to buy products or use the services rather than "merely prove something." In other words, if they came to protest or other sorts of "trouble," blacks could simply turn around and walk out the door.<sup>33</sup> Amazingly, the Fort Worth business integration process apparently succeeded without any incidents from either white or black patrons.

In 1969, the Fort Worth City Council approved a civil rights ordinance within the city. The ordinance provided fines of \$25 to \$200 to many places of business if the owner or employees discriminated against customers based on color, which included both black and Mexican-American citizens. Establishments governed under the ordinance were hotels and motels, restaurants and bars, commercial businesses, skating rinks, golf

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<sup>31</sup>Victoria and Walter L. Buenger, *Texas Merchant: Marvin Leonard and Fort Worth* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1998). Leonard's Brothers department store grew steadily since its opening and became very well known in Fort Worth. The owners sold the store to a larger corporation in October 1967 and the store disappeared from Fort Worth's landscape in the 1970s.

<sup>32</sup>Tim Madigan, "Signs of Change," [www.kri.com/papers/greatstories/worth/jimcrow6.html](http://www.kri.com/papers/greatstories/worth/jimcrow6.html), Date Accessed: 18 April 2005.

<sup>33</sup>W. L. Redus, "Desegregation Steps Here Disclosed," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 23 June 1963.

courses, washaterias, and bowling lanes. Private clubs, country clubs, and boarding houses with permanent guests remained outside of the civil rights ordinance jurisdiction.<sup>34</sup>

It took close to one hundred years for Fort Worth to fully integrate all areas of the city, but the fight was well worth it. As the years continue to move the nation forward in racial tolerance and unity, the city progresses as well. Even though Fort Worth remains a predominantly white city, the space is shared equally with all the various races that compose the area. The African American and white race relations experience opened a door in the southern town that allows people from all backgrounds the ability to live, work, vote, and learn equally.

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<sup>34</sup>“Fort Worth Passes Civil Rights Law,” *Dallas Morning News*, 12 November 1969.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Epilogue—How the Pieces of the Puzzle Fit

The decades between 1875, the end of Reconstruction, and the late 1970s saw Fort Worth, Texas change from a Southern frontier town into a thriving metropolis. Commerce moved from agriculture to packing houses and factories while the demographics reflected the economic growth. Referring back to the question posed at the end of the introduction, Fort Worth's history created a niche within the United States. The debate concerning whether Texas is a southern or a western state continues, but at least in Fort Worth's case, the answer is clear. The city's economy originally based in agriculture and ranching, was very similar to western towns along the country's frontier. The prevailing racial attitudes toward African Americans, however, were distinctly southern. It is these attitudes that are the most significant and dominant distinguishers of the city's characteristics and which place the town and state as a southern state. But more than simply denoting the city as southern, Fort Worth African Americans had a very similar experience to other blacks throughout the nation's urban centers. Perhaps the city's civil rights history was not as violent as experiences in other cities, but Fort Worth African Americans fought the same prejudices and barriers as their other brethren in the United States. As the city of Fort Worth's population and economy grew, so did areas of politics and available occupations, as well as other factors. The African American urban experience, especially, changed with the town.

Throughout the period covered in this thesis a significant pattern emerged. Much like the city, as years passed, the African American community of Fort Worth pushed the barriers of preconceived notions in the United States to create their own progressive history. In the city's case, it was a geographic stereotype of being a small dusty western town. For Fort Worth African Americans, it was the racial stereotypes and prejudices that barred them in many areas of society but against which they unified and fought for better conditions. Fort Worth African Americans had a southern urban experience because southern prejudice created obstacles for them. Racial tension was a common theme in the years following the Civil War and continued in Fort Worth at the turn of the century. Prejudice and segregation occurred in all aspects of the city—in the job market, sports, entertainment, legal justice, and education. These obstacles, however, did not hold blacks back.

As Fort Worth's city boundaries expanded and the population grew, African Americans held a pronounced place within the city's demographics. While the county's racial composition contains a majority of white citizens, African Americans made up 12 percent of the population in 1990 and 13.8 percent in the 2000 census. (Table 8)

Table 8. 1990 and 2000 Tarrant County Census Information

Pop.	White	African American	Asian	Hispanic	Native American	
<b>1990</b>	1,170,103	917,501	140,740	29,705	139,879	5,551
Percentage of Pop.:	78%	12%	2.5%	12%		.47%
<b>2000</b>	1,446,219	1,154,083	199,578	60,741	345,646	101,235
Percentage of Pop.:	79.8%	13.8%	4.2%	23.9%		.7%

*Source:* All data is from U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Population, 1990 and 2000.

These numbers state that while Fort Worth drew a large population of African Americans, it was not nearly on the scale as larger cities such as Chicago or New York. The tables also portray numbers that show how African Americans are neither the majority nor a true minority. (Table 9)

Table 9. 2000 Fort Worth City Census Information

Population	White	African American	Asian	Hispanic	Native American
534,694	319,212	108,543	13,902	159,339	32,082
Percentage of Pop.;	59.7%	20.3%	2.6%	29.8%	.6%

*Source:* All data is from U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Population, 2000.

Despite how far Fort Worth has come since 1875, the city still has a way to go before being a fully integrated metropolis where African Americans move to fulfill the great American dream. It is doubtful there is currently a city within the United States that could guarantee such an ideal goal. Racial prejudices still haunt the city streets, especially among predominantly segregated residential neighborhoods.<sup>1</sup> In 1980, Fort Worth ranked as the eighteenth most segregated city in the United States. In order for the complete integration of the city's neighborhoods, 77.9 percent needed to move. While the segregated residential situation is improving, it seems more likely to indicate that the rising middle class is leaving poor black neighborhoods.<sup>2</sup>

As Fort Worth's economy changed, the city's racial demographics changed as well. The rising job market brought hopeful African Americans into the Texas city in

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<sup>1</sup>There are suggestions that racial prejudices still occur in Fort Worth, as seen by this article published just last year, 3 March 2004: Anthony Spangler, "Data on Stops by Police Suggest Racial Disparity," [www.dfw.com/mld/dfw/8094020.htm?template=contentModules/printstory.jsp](http://www.dfw.com/mld/dfw/8094020.htm?template=contentModules/printstory.jsp), Date Accessed: 22 January 2005.

<sup>2</sup>Mark R. Warren, "IAF in Texas: Creating a Multi-Racial Democratic Community: Case Study of the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation," [www.tresser.com/iafin.htm](http://www.tresser.com/iafin.htm); Date Accessed: 28 April 2005.

search of work. They did indeed find jobs, especially those relating to the budding railroads and bustling new stores and restaurants which required porters and waiters. African American women found plenty of work in washing and mending clothes. African Americans of both genders crossed racial boundaries and took jobs as mail carriers and porters on trains. They even opened their own businesses in black neighborhoods and along the “9<sup>th</sup> Street drag” between Jones and Calhoun.

Inspired by success in the business world, African Americans continued a trend of rising within Fort Worth society as they took on the political world. Around the turn of the century, white politicians took advantage of African American male voters. As the Republican and Democratic parties ignored black opinions, politically minded African American leaders stood up for their brethren. They constantly rallied each other to take a stand in state and local politics. Such men included the editor of the *Galveston City Times*, W. H. Noble in 1902 and Waco attorney, R. D. Evans, in 1922. Through these efforts and arguments, they encouraged each other to take a more active role in politics and therefore their own lives. In 1922, Fort Worth African Americans created a branch of the Independent Colored Voters’ League. Thirty years later, the city itself created a biracial committee to discuss all issues pertaining to the various races within the city. These activities though spread apart, shows the tenacity of African American citizens in Fort Worth as they worked toward political equality and progress.

Such ventures within the business and political world may not have had such success without the foundations within the African American community provided by churches, schools, and other social organizations. Churches played a fundamental role in the African American culture within Fort Worth. They were the first social institutions

created even before the city's founding in 1873. Not only did local churches provide spiritual guidance and moral teachings, they created a location for gatherings to discuss current issues and problems within the city. Such gathering places built a sense of community and unity, two extremely important aspects for a healthy racial identity in a society steeped in racial prejudicial history. This strong sense of identity carried Fort Worth African Americans through the decades, allowing them to push past the stereotypes and create a firm place within the city.

For Fort Worth African American churches, however, providing a sense of identity and racial pride was not the only thing they gave to the community. Black churches were the first institutions to create schools for the African American children in Fort Worth. They began as private schools and, with the advent of the Freedmen's Bureau after the Civil War, created a few small public schools. Churches also played an important part in nurturing the growth of African American businesses, especially regarding construction work. All of the black churches in the Fort Worth city limits are located either along the original African American business strip on 9<sup>th</sup> Street, or within the various all-black residential neighborhoods.

Education in Fort Worth has taken great strides since the city's organization. From private schools founded by churches, the Freedmen's Bureau opening public schools through churches in 1865, and finally to locally funded institutions, African Americans fought for their rights to gain an education. They knew what was important to them, their city, and their cultural future. As far as educational equality, however, Clifford Davis and the NAACP fight for complete school integration did not end in the 1960s. Even into the 1980s, the federal courts kept a watch on Fort Worth school

integration to ensure the city achieved a desired 78 percent white and 22 percent black student ratio in the same school. In 1988 Judge Eldon Mahon stopped the required busing and ruled that the Fort Worth schools had “successfully merged into a unitary system.” In 1992, however, the NAACP asked the federal courts to continue to preside over an old teacher integration case opened in 1966. In the case, the NAACP aimed for 30 percent of Fort Worth schoolteachers to be African American. By 1992, the school system only reached 22 percent of the required African American teachers in Fort Worth public schools.<sup>3</sup> The idea of complete integration in Fort Worth schools may be a goal that might not fully be achieved. This is not because the city itself does not want to have the desired student ratios and teacher percentages set forth in earlier law disputes, but rather the demographics do not supply the necessary numbers. As seen in the population layout of Fort Worth in Table 9, African Americans only make up approximately 20 percent of the city population, while Latinos have become the second most populous group in the growing metropolis.

Fort Worth is quickly becoming a microcosm of the American melting pot and as such, older southern prejudices do not hold as much influence as earlier in the century. The African American urban experience in Fort Worth contained numerous obstacles in the form of racial tensions, violence, and stereotypes, but as a minority race in a city steeped in southern idealism, African Americans succeeded in gaining a foothold within the city.

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<sup>3</sup>Gracie Bonds, “NAACP Calls for Teachers: Desegregation Order Unmet, Group Says,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 29 September 1992.



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